A Manifest Destiny

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"BETTINA THREW BACK HER VEIL"

A Manifest Destiny

BY

JULIA MAGRUDER
AUTHOR OF "A MAGNIFICENT PLEBEIAN"

ILLUSTRATED

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A MANIFEST DESTINY

CHAPTER I

BETTINA MOWBRAY, walking the deck of the ocean steamer bound for England, was aware that she was observed with interest by a great many pairs of eyes. Certainly the possessors of these eyes were not more interested in her than she was in the interpretation of their glances. It was, indeed, of the first importance to her to know that she was being especially noticed by the men and women of the world, who in large part made up the passenger list, since her beauty was her one endowment for the position in the great world which all her life she had intended and expected to occupy. She was anxious, therefore, to know whether the personal appearance which had been rated so high in the obscure places hitherto known to her

would or would not hold its own when she got out into life, as it were.

Therefore, as Miss Mowbray paced the deck, at the side of the erect elderly woman who had been her nurse and was now her maid, she was vigilantly regardful of the looks which were turned upon her, and at times, by straining her ears, she could even catch a word or two of comment. Both looks and words were gratifying in the extreme. They not only confirmed the previous verdict passed upon her beauty, but they gave evidence to her keen intuition that, judged by a higher standard, she had won a higher tribute.

Yet, ardent as this admiration was on the one side, and grateful as it was on the other, there the matter stopped. To those who would have approached her more closely Bettina set up a tacit barrier which no one had been able to cross, and, after several days at sea, she was still limited to the society of her maid. Those who had spoken to her once had been so politely repelled that they had not spoken again, and many of those who had felt inclined to speak had, on coming nearer to her, refrained instinctively.

There was something, apart from her beauty, which attracted the eye and the imagination in

this tall girl in her deep mourning. This, perhaps, was the twofold aspect which her different moods and expressions gave to her. At one time she looked so profoundly sad, dejected, almost despairing, that it was easy to connect her mourning dress with the loss of what had been dearest to her. At another time there was a buoyancy, animation, vividness, in her look which made her black clothes seem incongruous in any other sense than that in which a dark setting is sometimes used to throw into relief the brilliancy of a jewel.

And these two outward manifestations did, in truth, represent the dual nature which was Bettina's. Her mother, who had studied her with a keen and affectionate insight, had often told her that the two key-notes of her nature were love and ambition. So far, all the ardor of Bettina's heart had been centred in her delicate, exquisite little old mother, whom she had loved with something like frenzy; and it was from the loss of this mother that she was now enduring a degree of sorrow which might perhaps have overwhelmed her, had not the other strong instinct of nature acted as an antidote. After some weeks of what seemed like blank despair, the girl had roused herself with a sort of desperation, and

looked about her to see what was yet left to her in life. Then it was that ambition had come to her rescue. With a hardened feeling in her breast she told herself that she could never love again in the way in which she had loved her mother, so she must make the most of her opportunity to become a brilliant figure in the world.

This opportunity, fortunately, was quite within sight. A path had been opened before her feet by which she might walk to a higher rank and position than even her extravagant dreams had led her to expect.

In the isolation of her narrow village life she had read in the papers accounts of the English aristocracy; and to show off her beauty in such an atmosphere, and be called by a titled name, had fired her imagination to such a degree that her good mother had had many a pang of fear for the future of her child.

When Bettina found herself alone, the one profound attachment of her heart severed by death, she seemed to have no hope of relief from the dire oppression of her position, save that which lay in the possibilities of worldly enjoyment which might be in store for her if she chose to accept them. These took the form of a definite opportunity in the person of one whom her mother

entirely trusted and approved, and this in itself was enough for Bettina now. It was little less than a marvellous prospect for a girl in her position, but it had come about quite simply.

The rector of the church in the village where Mrs. Mowbray and her daughter lived was an Englishman of good family, the Rev. Arthur Spotswood by name. When his young relative, Horace Spotswood, who was cousin and heir to Lord Hurdly, came to travel in America, it was but natural that he should visit the rector in his home. Natural, too, it was that he should there encounter Bettina Mowbray; and as he thought her the most charming and most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and as his affections were quite disengaged, it was almost a matter of course that he should fall in love with her.

So aware of this was Bettina that when, one morning she had met and talked to the young fellow at the rectory, she wound up the account of the meeting which she gave to her mother by saying, quite simply:

"He will ask me to marry him, mamma, and I shall say yes. So for a short time I shall be Mrs. Horace Spotswood, the wife of a diplomat at the Russian court, and ultimately I shall be Lady Hurdly, with a London mansion, several

country places, and one of the greatest positions in English society."

"My child, my poor child!" said the mother, in a tone of distress, "what is to be the end of your inordinate ambition for the things of the world? You have got to discover the vanity and hollowness of them some time, but what must you suffer on your way to this experience! Money and position cannot bring happiness in marriage. Nothing can do that but love."

"But, you see, I propose to have love too," was the gay response. "I assure you it will not be a difficult matter to love such a man as this, and I assure you also that he is fathoms deep in love with me already. He is manly, handsome, healthy, well-bred, and altogether charming. As to my ever loving any created being as I love you, mother darling, that, I have always told you, is out of the question; but I can imagine myself caring a good deal for this young heir of Lord Hurdly."

"Bettina," said the mother, gravely, laying her hands on her daughter's shoulder and looking deep into her eyes, "you will have to come to it by suffering, my child, but you will come to it at last—the knowledge that even the love which you give to me is slight and inadequate,

and not worthy to be compared with the love which you will one day feel for the man who, as your husband, shall call forth your highest feeling. I believe this with firm conviction, and I beg you not to throw away your chance of a woman's best heritage. Don't marry this man, or any man, until you can feel that even the great love you have given me is poor compared with that. Heaven knows I love you, child, and mother-love is stronger than daughter-love; but I could not love you so well or so worthly if I had not loved your father more."

These words, so impatiently listened to, were destined to come back to Bettina afterward, though at the time she resented the very suggestion of what they predicted.

Her instinct about young Spotswood had been exactly true. He had become fascinated with her during their first interview, and had followed up the acquaintance with ardor, making her very soon a proposal of marriage.

Lord Hurdly, his cousin, was unmarried, it appeared, and was an inveterate enemy to matrimony. Horace Spotswood was his nearest of kin and legal heir. But Lord Hurdly was not over sixty two or three, and was likely to live a long time. Finding it, perhaps, not very agreeable

to be constantly reminded that another man would some day stand in his shoes, his lordship had procured for Horace a diplomatic position at St. Petersburg, where, although the society was delightful, the pay was small. As his heir, however, Lord Hurdly made him a very liberal allowance, and with this it was easy for Horace to indulge his taste for travel. In this way he had come to America, intending to see it extensively; but he met Bettina, and from that moment gave up every other thought but the dominant one of winning her for his wife.

Even when he had asked and been accepted he could not leave her side, but concluded to await there Lord Hurdly's answer to his letter announcing his engagement. He was not without certain misgivings on this point, but he had written so convincingly, as he thought, of Bettina's beauty, breeding, and fitness for the position of Lady Hurdly that was to be, that he would not and could not believe that his cousin would disapprove. Besides, he was too blissfully happy to grieve over problematical troubles, and so he quite gave himself up to the joys of his present position and ardent dreams of the future.

It happened, however, that Lord Hurdly's letter, when it came, was a cold, curt, and most de-

cided refusal to consent to the marriage. He objected chiefly on the score of Bettina's being an American, though he did not hesitate to say also that he considered his heir a fool to think of marrying a woman without fortune, when he might so easily do better. In conclusion, he said that if this infatuated nonsense, as he called it, went on, he would withdraw his allowance from the very day of the marriage. He ended by hoping that Horace would come to his senses, and let him know that the thing was at an end.

Poor Horace! He would fain have kept this letter from Bettina, but she insisted upon seeing it. Having done so, she became fired with a keen desire to triumph over this obdurate opposition, and when Horace asked her if she would still fulfil her pledge, in the face of his altered fortunes, she agreed with rather more ardor of feeling than she had hitherto shown.

The truth was, Bettina had disappointed him in this last respect. Her mother was so obviously and unquestionably her first thought, and her mother's failing health was so plainly a grief which his love could not counterbalance, that he at times had pangs of jealousy, of which he afterward felt ashamed. Was not this intense love for her mother in itself a proof of her great

capacity of loving, and must he not, with patient waiting, one day see himself loved in like manner? Still, he chafed under the fact that every day her mother became more and more the object of her time and attention, so that he saw her now more rarely and for shorter periods. She always explained this fact by saying that the invalid was more suffering and in need of her, and she never seemed to think it possible that this excuse would not be all-sufficing.

At last a day came which brought him what he had been fearing — a summons to return to his post of duty. At one time he would have attempted to get a longer leave, even at some risk; but now, with the prospect of having his allowance from England withdrawn, he dared not do so. He knew that it would require great economy for two to live on what had once seemed so inadequate for one, and he laid the matter frankly before Bettina. She was full of hope that Lord Hurdly would relent, and spoke so indifferently about their lack of money that he loved her all the more for it.

He had some hope, in his ardent soul, that he might persuade Bettina to be married at once and go with him, but when he ventured to propose this he found that the mere suggestion of

her leaving her mother, then or ever, made her almost angry. She insisted that her mother would get better; that when the weather changed she would be braced up and strengthened, and then, she hoped, a thorough change would do her good. So her plan was to let her lover go at once, and some months later, when Mrs. Mowbray should be stronger, they would go to England together, and there Spotswood could meet her and they could be married.

With this promise he was obliged to go. It was a new and annoying experience for him to have to consider the question of money so closely. True, he was Lord Hurdly's heir-at-law, and he could not be disinherited, so far as the title and entailed estates were concerned, but it was wholly within the power of the present lord to deprive him of the other properties, and he knew Lord Hurdly well enough to understand that he was tenacious of any position once taken.

So he said farewell to Bettina with a sad heart. He was ardently willing to give up money and ease and to endure hardness for her sake, but he would have wished to feel that the sadness and depression in which Bettina parted from him had been the echo of what was in his own heart, rather than, as he was quite aware, the deeper

care and sorrow of her anxiety about her mother's health.

Once away from her, however, the strong flame of his love burned so vividly that he wrote her, by almost every mail, letters of such heart-felt love and sympathy and adoration that he could but feel confident that they would bring him a reply in kind. When at last her letters did come, they were so short, scant, and preoccupied that they fell like blows upon his heart. When he thought of the passionately loving letters that she was getting almost daily, while he got so rarely these half-hearted and insufficient ones, his pride became aroused, and he decided that he would imitate her to the extent of writing more rarely, even if he could not find it in his heart to write to her coolly, as she did to him. In this way it came to pass that there was a distinct change in the tone of his letters to her. As day by day, and sometimes week by week, passed without his hearing from her, and as her letters, when they came, continued to speak only of her mother's health and her grief about it, the young fellow's love and pride were alike so wounded that he forced himself, so far as his nature and feelings would allow, to imitate her attitude to him, and to cease the expression of the

vehement love for her in which he got no response.

At last, after a longer interval than usual, he got a letter from Bettina, which told him that her mother was dead—had, indeed, been dead and buried almost two weeks before she had roused herself to write to him.

In the tone of this letter there was a sort of desperate resolution that showed that a reaction had come on, under the stress of which she had been roused to act with energy. She announced that as she had found it intolerable to stay where she was, she would sail for Europe at once. She fixed the 23d of June as the day on which she had decided to sail. In reality, however, she actually embarked from New York just one week earlier. This was in pursuance of a certain plan which required that she should have one week in London quite free of Horace before he should come to claim the fulfilment of her promise to marry him.

CHAPTER II

BETTINA was in London. The ocean voyage had done her good, and the necessary effect of change, variety, new faces, new feelings, new thoughts, had been to take her out of herself—the self that was nothing but a grieving and bereaved daughter—and to quicken the pleasure-loving instincts and thirst for admiration which were as inherently, though not as prominently, a part of her. There was still a root of bitterness springing up within her whenever she thought of her mother's being taken from her, and this very element it was which urged her to make all she could of life, in the hope of partially filling the void in her heart. She was not even yet reconciled to the loss of her mother, and there was a certain defiance of destiny in her resolution to get some compensation for the wrong she had sustained in losing what was dearest to her.

On arriving in London, Bettina went to a

hotel, and from there made inquiries as to the whereabouts of Lord Hurdly. Parliament was in session, and his lordship was in his town house in Grosvenor Square. Having ascertained the hour at which he was most likely to be at home, Bettina betook herself at that hour to his house.

She refused to give her name to the servant who answered her ring, and asked merely that Lord Hurdly might be told that a lady wished to speak to him on a matter of importance. The servant, after a moment's hesitation, ushered her into a small reception-room on the first floor, and requested her to wait there.

She stood for a few moments alone in this room, her heart beating fast. She wore the American style of deep mourning, which swathed her in dense, impenetrable black from head to feet, and seemed to add to her somewhat unusual tallness.

The door opened. Lord Hurdly entered. She had seen photographs of him, and even through that thick veil would have known him anywhere. The tall, thin figure, sharp eyes, aquiline nose, clean-shaven face, and scrupulous dress were all familiar to both memory and imagination.

He paused on the threshold of the room, as if slightly repelled by the strange appearance of

the shrouded figure before him. Then he spoke, coldly and concisely.

"You wished to speak to me?" he said. "I have a few moments only at my disposal."

Bettina raised one hand and threw back her veil, revealing thus not only her face, but her whole figure clothed in smooth, tight-fitting black, so plain and devoid of trimming that the exquisite lines were shown to the best advantage. Her face, surrounded by black draperies, looked as purely tinted as a flower, and the excitement of the moment had made her eyes brilliant and flushed her cheeks.

The imperturbability of Lord Hurdly's face relaxed. His lips parted; a smothered sound, as of surprise, escaped him. Certainly at that moment Bettina was nothing less than bewilderingly beautiful.

"I have to beg your pardon for coming to you so unceremoniously," she said. "My excuse is that I have a matter of great importance to speak to you of."

Her voice was certainly a charming one, and if her accent was such as he might have found fault with under other circumstances, under these he found it an added attraction. She had put her own construction on Lord Hurdly's evident sur-

prise at sight of her, and it was one which gave her an increased self-possession and added to her sense of power.

"Let us go into another room," said Lord Hurdly. "I cannot keep you here, and whatever you may have to say to me I am quite at leisure to attend to."

He led the way from the room, and Bettina followed in silence. She had had innumerable dreams of grandeur, poor child! but she had been too ignorant even to imagine such a place as this house. Its furnishing and decorations represented not only the accumulated wealth, but also the accumulated taste and opportunity, of many successive generations. She felt an ineffable emotion of deep, sensuous enjoyment in her present surroundings which made her heart leap at the idea that all these things might some day be hers. Lord Hurdly looked exceedingly well preserved, and that day might be very far distant. All the more reason, therefore, she told herself, why she should make peace between him and Horace, so that she might at least be sometimes a guest in this house, and be lifted into an atmosphere where she felt for the first time that she was in her true element. It was not only the magnificence which she saw on every side which

so appealed to her. It was that air of the best in everything that made her feel, in Lord Hurdly's presence, as well as in his house, that civilization could not go further—that life, on its material side, had nothing more to offer. And Bettina had now reached a point in her experience where material pleasure seemed to be all that was left. She quite believed that all of the joy of loving was buried in the grave of her mother.

Her heart was beating fast as she entered Lord Hurdly's library and saw him close the door behind them. It then struck her as being a little peculiar that he should have brought her here without even knowing who she was or what she wanted of him.

A doubt, a scarcely possible suspicion, came into her mind.

"Have you any idea who I am?" she said.

"It suffices me to know what you are."

"Ah! I do not understand," she said, puzzled.

"You have come upon me without ceremony, madam," said Lord Hurdly, with a slightly old-fashioned pomposity in his polished manner, "and I may therefore ask you to excuse an absence of ceremony in me in alluding to the impression which you have made upon me. You are a stranger to me—an American, I judge from

your speech. I hope that I am to be so fortunate as to hear that there is something which I can do for you."

"There is," Bettina said—"a thing so vital and important to me that, now I am in your presence, I am afraid to venture to speak, for fear you may refuse to hear my prayer."

"You are in small danger from that quarter, I assure you. I am ready to do for you whatever you may ask. Let me, however, put a few questions before I hear your request. You are wearing mourning. Is it, perhaps, for your husband?"

"For my mother," said Bettina, with a sudden trembling of the lip and suffusion of the eyes which gave her a new charm, in revealing the fact that this young goddess had a human heart which could be quickly stirred to emotion.

"Forgive me," said Lord Hurdly, with great courtesy. "Forget that I have roughly touched a spot so sore, and tell me this, if you will: are you married or unmarried?"

"I am unmarried," said Bettina, beginning to tremble as she found the important moment upon her; "but I am about to be married. I have made this visit to London beforehand only

to see you. The man I am going to marry is your cousin and heir, Horace Spotswood."

Lord Hurdly's guarded face betrayed a certain agitation, but the signs of this were quickly controlled.

He looked straight into her eyes for a few seconds without speaking. Then he crossed the room and touched an electric button, saying, as he did so :

"I will get rid of an engagement that I had, so that I may be quite at leisure to talk with you."

Neither spoke again until the servant had come, taken his instructions, and gone away, closing the door behind him. There was a certain determination in Lord Hurdly's manner and expression which did not escape Bettina. She was sure that her revelation of her identity had prompted some decisive course of action in his mind, but what it was she could not guess from that inscrutable face.

"I am now quite free for the morning," her companion said. "Naturally there is much for us to say to each other. Will you not lay aside your bonnet and wrap ? The day is warm, and that heavy mourning must distress you."

Certainly his manner was kind. Bettina be-

gan to like him and to hope for success in her object in coming here. Quickly unbuttoning her black gloves, she unsheathed her lovely hands, which were bare of rings. Then with a few deft motions she removed her outer wrap and her bonnet with its long, thick veil.

In so doing she revealed the fact that she had an exquisite head, with delicious masses of brown hair which looked almost reddish in its contrast to the dense black of her gown, the smooth severity of which accentuated every lovely curve of her figure, as it would have done every defect, had there been defect. This gown was fitted to her so absolutely that one had the satisfying sense that one looked at the woman instead of at her clothes. There were fine old portraits on the wall, of noble ladies who had once done the honors of this great establishment, but the fairest of them paled before the glowing loveliness of this girl. For she looked a girl, despite her sombre garments, and there was a certain timidity in her manner which strengthened this impression.

Lord Hurdly offered her a seat, and then took another, facing her.

"In engaging yourself to marry Horace Spotswood," he began, deliberately, "you have made

the supreme, if not the irreparable, mistake of your life."

Bettina's white skin showed the sudden ebb of the blood in her veins as he said these words.

"Why?" she asked, concisely.

"Because he is no match for you, and because your marrying him would not only place you on a lower plane than where you belong, but it would also so seriously injure his position in life that there would be no possible chance for him to retrieve it until my death. I am comparatively a young man, and likely to live a long time. Apart from that, I may marry. I had no expectation or intention of doing so, but his recent defiance of me has made me sometimes feel inclined to the idea. I have so far changed in my feeling on this subject that if I could meet and win a woman to my mind, I would marry at once. What then would become of Horace? He has a mere pittance besides his pay, which is a ridiculous sum for a man to marry on. He has wronged you in putting you in such a position, and you have equally wronged him."

Bettina had turned very white as he spoke. The picture he drew was bad enough in itself, but to have it sketched before her in her present surroundings made it infinitely worse.

"If we have wronged each other, we have done it ignorantly," she said. "He assured me that you were determined never to marry, and he counted on your past kindness and your attachment to him—"

She broke off, her voice shaken.

"On the same ground I counted on him," said Lord Hurdly. "He was in no position to marry against my will, and in engaging to do so he defied me. Let him take the consequences."

"Then you are determined not to relent?" Bettina faltered. "You will not forgive him for the offence of proposing to make me his wife?"

"I did not say that," returned Lord Hurdly, with a subtle change of tone. "I certainly should not forgive him for marrying you, but for proposing to do so I am ready enough to forgive him, provided he comes to his senses at that point and goes no further. In that event I am ready not only to continue the handsome income that I have allowed him, but to give him outright the principal of it."

Bettina had never pretended that she was deeply in love with Horace Spotswood. Indeed, she had quite decided within herself that she was incapable of such a state of feeling, and it was her belief that the fervor and intensity of love

which she had given to her mother had taken the place of what some women give to their husbands. Still, she looked upon her prospective marriage to him as one of the fixed facts of the universe, and Lord Hurdly's words bewildered her.

Keener than this surprise, however, was her sense of humiliation at the implacable offence which Lord Hurdly had taken at his heir's proposed marriage with herself. That he had wished Horace to marry she knew; it was therefore the woman whom he had chosen that Lord Hurdly resented.

She rose to her feet, feeling herself giddy, and knowing that she was white with agitation. Her one idea was to get away—to escape the scrutiny of the intense gaze which was fixed upon her.

"I must go. I beg your pardon for coming," she said, with a proud coldness, reaching for her wrap.

"You must not go. I owe you endless thanks for coming, and I will show you that you have to congratulate yourself also on this interview. If you went now, you would defeat all the good that may come of it. Sit down, I beg of you, and hear me out."

His manner was not only urgent, it was also

kind, and nothing could have been more respectful than his every look and tone.

Bettina sat down again and waited.

"What is it that has shocked you?" he said. "Is it because of your great love for Horace—or is it his for you which you are thinking of most?"

"I do not see that I am bound to answer you that question," said Bettina, proudly. "My reasons are sufficient for myself."

"You are in no way bound, my dear young lady, but you would be wise to answer me. I have every disposition to act as your friend in this matter, and you would be making a mistake to turn away from me without hearing what I have to say. If you are imagining that the young fellow with whom you have an engagement of marriage would be rendered inconsolable by the loss of you, when it would be made up to him by the possession of a fortune, perhaps you overestimate things."

"What things?" she said, still cold and withheld in her manner, her pale face very set.

"The unselfishness of man's love in general, and of this man's in particular," he said; "and, for another thing, yourself. It seems a brutal thing to say, but if you believe that that hot-headed, undisciplined boy is capable of a sus-

tained affection against such odds of fortune as this case presents, then I disagree with you, and I know him better than you do."

Bettina's face flushed.

"He does love me — he does!" she cried, in some agitation. "I have been cold and careless toward him, and have told him that my heart was buried in my mother's grave." At these words her voice trembled. "He knows how hard it is for me to think of another kind of love just yet; but he has been kindness itself, and has written me the dearest, lovingest letters that ever a woman had. If they have been a little rarer and colder lately, it is only because of my own shortcomings toward him. I shall try to atone for them now. Since I realize how great an injury I have done to him, I shall try to be his compensation for it."

"And you think you will succeed? I doubt it."

Something in his manner impressed her in spite of herself. Perhaps he saw that it was so, for he pushed his advantage.

"Compare the length and opportunities of my intercourse with him and yours," he said. "You would be acting the part of absolute folly not to listen to me now. In the end you will be as free

to act as you were in the beginning. Only let me remind you that his future is involved as well as your own."

He saw that this argument told.

"I am willing to listen," she said.

"I am grateful to you," he answered, with that air of finished politeness which makes the best graces of a young man seem crude, and which Bettina was not too ignorant to appreciate at its proper value.

"I have known Horace as child and boy and man — if he may yet be called a man," he said, with a light touch of scorn. "You have known him in one capacity and state only — that of a lover, a *rôle* he can no doubt play very prettily, and one in which, despite his youth, he is far from being unpractised. He has been in love oftener than it behooves me to say or you to hear—quite harmless affairs, of course, but they prove to one who has watched him as I have that his nature is fickle and capricious. I confess that when I heard you say, just now, that his letters of late had been rarer and less ardent, I could not wholly attribute it to the reason which so quickly satisfied you. As a rule, these intensely ardent feelings are not of long duration, and I know well both the intensity and the brevity of

Horace's attacks of love. It was for this very reason that I so resented the idea of his marrying without my advice. I foresaw that he would soon weary of any woman. All the more reason, therefore, for his choosing one who was suited to him, apart from the matter of his loving her. I knew he had not the staying quality — that he was quite incapable of a sustained affection. I therefore considered his taste in the matter less than my own. As he was my heir in the event of my not marrying, I felt that I had the right to demand that he should marry suitably to his position."

"I regret that he should have made an engagement which has disappointed you," said Bettina, a slight curl at the corners of her lips.

"I regret it also; but you may remember that at the beginning of this interview I spoke of this mistake on your part and on his as great, though not perhaps irreparable."

He was looking at her keenly, and he saw that his words had no effect upon her except to mystify her.

"I do not see any way to its reparation," she said, and was about to continue, when he interrupted her.

"I have pointed out the way—a rupture of the engagement by mutual consent."

"A consent that he would never give," said Bettina, with a certain pride of confidence.

"And you?" he asked.

"Nor I either," she said, "unless I were convinced that he wished it."

"It would perhaps be not impossible to convince you of that, granted a little time," said Lord Hurdly. "But, apart from his wish, have you no consideration for his interest? His position in diplomacy is at present insignificant, but he has talents and a chance to rise, unless that chance be utterly frustrated by his embarrassing himself with a family—a condition that would be death to his career. Ask any one you choose, and they will tell you that there cannot be two opinions about this. Besides, through my help he has been able to live like a man of fortune. His allowance, however, will be stopped on the day of his marriage, if he persists in such a course. If he abandons it, he will find himself with the principal as well as the interest at his disposal. So situated, he has every chance to rise. Under the other conditions, he inevitably falls. What would become of him ultimately is too dreary a line of conjecture to dwell upon."

Bettina's face was paler still. The tears sprang to her eyes—tears of mortification and keen regret. The thought of her mother pierced through her, and the consciousness that she had no longer the refuge of that gentle heart to cast herself upon almost overcame her. Pride lent her aid, however, and she rallied quickly.

"You have fully demonstrated to me," she said, "that I have injured your cousin in promising to marry him. I did it in ignorance, however. With the facts before me which you have just given, I should perhaps have acted differently. Regret now, however, is useless."

"On the contrary, this is one of the rare cases in which regret is not useless. The reparation of your mistake is in your own hands."

The possibility of doing what he urged flashed through Bettina's mind. Horace would certainly be infinitely better off without her, in every rational and material sense; and at this stage of Bettina's development the rational and material were predominant. But what of her, apart from Horace? This thought found vent in words.

"You have been looking at this subject from your own point of view," she said, "and perhaps naturally. I must, however, think of an aspect of the case in which you have no interest. I am

absolutely alone in the world, and if, for your cousin's sake, I made this sacrifice—"

In spite of herself her voice faltered.

Lord Hurdly drew his chair a little nearer to her. His eyes were fixed upon her with a yet more intent gaze as he said, with directness and decision:

"You are quite mistaken. It is this aspect of the case which concerns me chiefly. If, as is undoubtedly true, the prevention of this most mistaken marriage would be an advantage to Horace, to you it may be a far greater gain, and to me it may be the fulfilment of all that I have ever desired in life."

"What do you mean?" she said, bewildered.

"I mean that the supreme desire of my heart is, and has been from the moment my eyes rested on you, to make you Lady Hurdly absolutely and at once, instead of your waiting for a name and position which, after all, may never come to you."

Her heart beat so that her breathing came in smothered gasps. The piercing demand of his eyes was almost terrifying to her. She saw that he was absolutely in earnest, and the commiseration which she felt for Horace struggled with the dazzling temptation which this opportunity

offered to that strong ambition which was so great an element in her essential nature.

"Do not be shocked or startled by the suddenness of my proposal," he said. "I trust that you will come to see that it is eminently wise and reasonable. When I said the marriage was an unsuitable one, I was thinking more of you than of Horace. Your beauty, your manner, your voice, your words, your whole ego and personality, show you to have been born for a great position. It is a case of manifest destiny. The fortune and the social rank that I can bestow are all too little for you; I should like to be able to put a queen's crown on your beautiful head. But such as I am—a man who has made his impression on the current history of his country, and who, though no longer young in the crude sense that counts only by months and years, is still by no means old—and such things as I have and can command, I lay at your feet, begging you humbly to impart to them a value which they have never had before, by accepting them and becoming the sharer of my name, my position, and my fortune, and the mistress of my heart."

He had risen and was standing in front of her with the resolution of a strong purpose in his eyes. But she could not meet them, those dom-

inating, searching eyes. The thoughts that his words had given rise to were too agitating, too uncertain, too tormenting to her. The thought of giving Horace up pained her more than she would have believed, while the vision of the grandeur so urged upon her, which not ten minutes gone she had seen dashed like a full beaker from her thirsty lips, tormented her as well. It was to her a vast sacrifice to think of resigning such possibilities, yet at the first she had no other thought but to resign them. The arguments for Horace's future career which had been urged upon her also played their part in her consciousness now, and the seething confusion of images in her brain made her senses swim.

Lord Hurdly must have seen her agitation, for he hastened to say:

"I have been too hasty. You must forgive me. Do not try to answer me at present. I see that you are overwrought. Let me beseech you to rest a little while. I will send for the housekeeper."

"No, no! I must go," she answered, starting to her feet. But she had overestimated her strength. She sank back in her chair.

He went himself and brought her a glass of wine, talking to her with a soothing reassurance

as she drank it. He reproached himself for having been too hurried, too rash, but pleaded the earnestness of his hopes as an excuse. When she had taken the wine she wanted to go, but he entreated her so humbly not to punish him too deeply for his fault that when he begged her to let him call the housekeeper to sit with her until luncheon, which he implored her to take before leaving, she acquiesced, too fagged out mentally to take any decided position of her own.

To the housekeeper Lord Hurdly explained that this lady was in deep trouble—a fact sufficiently attested by her heavy mourning — and would like to rest awhile before eating some luncheon. Bettina saw herself regarded with a respectful awe which she had never had a taste of before. The housekeeper, with the sweetest of voices and kindest of manners, promised to do all in her power, and Lord Hurdly withdrew.

Bettina could not talk. She lay back on the lounge and submitted to be gently fanned and having salts occasionally held to her nose. But all her effort was to compose her thoughts—a difficult attempt, as the image of her mother was the one which insisted on taking the pre-eminence in her mind. She ordered it down, with a sort of bitterness. Had her mother been alive,

"SHE SANK BACK IN HER CHAIR"

she would have gladly fled from this puzzle into which her life had tangled itself, and gone back to America to rest and mother-love. So she told herself, at least. But then followed the reflection that in her mother's death the refuge of love's calm and protection was gone from her forever, and that she must either remain in Europe under one or the other of the two conditions offered her, or else resign herself to the apathy of despair.

It was not in her to do this, and the brilliant possibilities which Lord Hurdly had suggested flashed into her mind, and so excited her that she suddenly rose to her feet and announced that her slight indisposition was past, asking the housekeeper to take her somewhere to rearrange her hair and prepare herself for luncheon.

Even had Bettina been the possessor of a happy heart which rejoiced in a fulfilled and contented love for the man she had promised to marry, the other, dominating side of her nature could not have been quite stifled as she walked through the halls and corridors of this magnificent mansion. These were things her imagination had always pictured as her proper position in life, and which the unregenerate heart within her had always craved. But how far beyond her ignorant dreams

was the grand repose of this beautiful house! It was so much more than she had conceived that the new supply to her senses seemed, in a way, to create a new demand in them.

Never, perhaps, had she so appreciated what it must be to be a *grande dame* as to-day, when she was on the point of refusing such an opportunity, though it was just within her grasp. For she had no idea but that she should refuse it, and this very consciousness made her more friendly in her feelings and actions toward Lord Hurdly than she would otherwise have been.

When she had adjusted her dress and smoothed her hair, before large mirrors which gave her a better view of her loveliness than she had ever had before, a servant summoned her to luncheon, and at the foot of the stairs she saw Lord Hurdly awaiting her.

So seen, a decided baldness, which she had not much noticed before, became evident, but there was a certain distinction in the man's general air which this rather seemed to heighten. His manner of delicate solicitude for her was the perfection of good-breeding, and when she answered him reassuringly, and walked by his side to the dining-room, a sudden conviction seized her that she had come into her own—that this was the

position for which she had been born, and that, independent of the fact that she had determined to decline it, it was her fate, which she could not escape. She tried to coax the belief that it was as Horace's wife that she would one day enjoy all these delights, but the thought eluded her. She could not see Horace in the seat now filled by his cousin. In imagination as well as in reality it was Lord Hurdly who occupied that seat.

This conviction, which every moment deepened, she could not shake off and could not account for. She had a feeling that it was forced upon her consciousness through some dominating power of Lord Hurdly's spirit over her own. She felt as if she were hypnotized. She wondered if it could be so, and if she would presently come to herself and find that it was all a delusion and she had never seen Lord Hurdly or his house, but was on her way to St. Petersburg to join Horace and settle down to a limited and economical way of living.

At this thought her heart fell. She had laid her hand upon this dazzling prize of worldly wealth and position. Could she let it go?

During luncheon no reference was made to the subject of their late conversation. The servants remained in the room, and Lord Hurdly talked

of public and quite impersonal affairs. In so doing he showed a trenchant insight, a broad knowledge of the world, an undeniably powerful mentality, and a decided skill in the art of pleasing. If the tone of his talk was cynical, it found, for that very reason, all the clearer echo in Bettina's heart. A certain tendency to cynicism was inborn in her, and the bitterness she felt at the loss of her mother had accentuated this. What was the use of loving, she asked herself, when love must end like this? In her heart she passionately hoped that she might never love again. And she had also a shrinking from being loved in any ardent manner that might make demands upon her which she could not respond to.

When the time came for Bettina to leave, she found that the cab in which she had come had been sent away, and, in its place, Lord Hurdly's brougham waited for her. He escorted her himself to the carriage door, and when the great footman who held it open touched his hat in silence as he took her orders, and then mounted beside his twin brother on the box and she was bowled away, on padded cushions from which emanated a delicious odor of fine leather, Bettina felt that, for the first time in her life, she was in her proper element.

The events of the morning seemed to her like some agitating dream. She wondered how long it had been since she left her hotel, and tried to guess what time it was. As she did so, her eyes fell on the small clock, neatly encased in the leather upholstering of the carriage just in front of her. The fitness of this object and of everything about her gave her a delicious sense of adaptation to her environment which she had never had before.

When she got out at her hotel, the footman, with the same salute of ineffable respect, said that his lordship had told him to ask if she had any further orders for the carriage to-day or to-morrow. She declined the offer, but, none the less, she felt flattered by the attention.

Lord Hurdly's only further reference to their last conversation had been to ask her to pay his words the respect of a few days' consideration at least. He had learned from her that Horace was unaware of her being in England, and that she had a whole week at her disposal before he would expect to meet her there. When he asked for a part of that week, in which to give him the opportunity to prove to her that her duty to Horace, as well as to herself, demanded the rupture of this mistaken engagement, she was sufficiently in-

fluenced by the subtlety of this appeal to grant his request.

To her surprise, several days went by, and he did not come to see her nor write. Every morning the carriage was sent to the hotel and the footman came to her door for orders, but she always answered that she did not require it. Every morning, also, came a lavish offering of flowers, the great exotic flowers which Bettina loved—huge, heavy-petalled roses and green translucent-looking orchids. But, except for these, he did not thrust himself upon her notice—a fact which during the first and second days she gave him the greatest credit for, but by the third had grown to feel a certain resentment at.

In the mean time there had followed her from home a letter from Horace. It was the coldest she had ever had from him, and set her to thinking deeply as to the possible cause of his coldness. Could it be, she asked herself, that Lord Hurdly was right in calling him capricious? Had he—as was possible, of course—cooled in his ardor for her, and come to see that this hasty engagement of his had been a great mistake, as she herself had come to see?

For this point, at least, Bettina had positively reached. Why, therefore, should she adhere to

her engagement in the face of the knowledge that such an adherence would be to his disadvantage, no less than to hers ?

These arguments would have quite prevailed with her but for one thing. This was the conviction, not yet changed, though somewhat shaken by Lord Hurdly's account of him, that Horace really loved her and would suffer in losing her.

Deprived of the restraint of her mother's influence, Bettina had progressed with rapidity in her way toward worldliness and selfish ambition, but she had a heart. Her love for her mother had given abundant proof of that, if there were nothing else; and now her heart combated the influence of her head, which decreed that only a fool would reject the great good fortune now held out to her.

In point of fact, Bettina had been influenced more by ambition than by love in engaging herself to Horace, and the gratification of a far more splendid ambition was offered to her in making this other marriage. In it, also, love would play but little part, and this she felt to be decidedly a gain. Yet she was not so far lost to the sentiments of kindness and loyalty, that she had learned from the teaching and example of her mother, as

not to hesitate before wounding and humiliating the man who, as she still believed, loved her devotedly. Could it have been proved that she was mistaken in so believing, Lord Hurdly's case would have been already won.

CHAPTER III

IN the end Lord Hurdly prevailed, and that end was swifter in coming than Bettina would have believed to be possible. She had allowed herself a week to wait in London, and for the first day or two of that week she lived in dread lest Lord Hurdly should come to her and renew the arguments which she was quite determined to combat. As the days passed and he did not come, she began to fear that the opportunity of final decision on the momentous question of her choice between these two men would not again be offered her. Her better nature still held her to her pledge to Horace, but already she had come to feel that, but for his disappointment at losing her, she would have accepted Lord Hurdly's proposal, as it offered a full and immediate fulfilment of her dreams of ambition, and the other postponed these indefinitely, while it promised comparatively little in any other direction.

Toward the end of the week Lord Hurdly called,

and, without any reference to his own hopes and intentions, spoke, with what seemed to be a considerable hesitation and regret, of his young cousin's character and mode of life, which he declared were known, to every one except Bettina, to be exceedingly capricious — even light. He dwelt upon the fact, well known to Bettina, of his earnest desire that his cousin and heir should marry, and gave as a reason for this desire, what he declared to be the accepted fact, that Horace was inclined to a dissipated manner of living, which he hoped marriage might correct.

Poor Bettina! She had believed the young man, to whom she had pledged herself, to be the very opposite of all this. Yet how absolutely ignorant concerning him she really was! And the rector of her church, who was supposed to vouch for him, knew in reality as little as she. How easily she might have been mistaken in him! And yet, and yet, there was a still, small voice in her heart which confirmed her in her resolve to believe in him until she had proof that such a belief was ill founded.

"With his past I have nothing to do," she said to Lord Hurdly, with a certain show of pride. "If it has been lower than my ideal of him, I regret it; but I am entirely sure that since he has

known me and had my promise to be his wife he has been true to all that that promise required of him."

"This being your conclusion," Lord Hurdly answered, "you force upon me the necessity of showing you a letter which I have to-day received from a friend in St. Petersburg, and which I would, without strong reason to the contrary, have gladly spared you the pain of reading." With these words, he handed Bettina a letter.

It was signed with a name unknown to her, but written evidently in the tone and manner of an intimate friend. The first page or two referred to matters wholly indifferent to her—public affairs and the like—but toward the end were these words:

"Are you as set as ever in your determination not to marry? Pity it is that such a noble name and fortune as yours should not pass on to a son of your own, instead of to one who, it is to be feared, will do little to honor it. I see him here, at court and everywhere, accurately fulfilling the rather unflattering predictions which I long ago made concerning him. There is a story that he became engaged to be married during his travels in America, and I hear that he owns up to it and speaks of being joined by his

fiancée and married on this side. I hope it may not be so. Certainly his present manner of living argues against the rumor, unless—a supposition I am reluctant to believe—he proposes to keep up, as a married man, the habits which are so readily forgiven to a bachelor, though not to a husband."

There was more, but Bettina read no further. This was enough. She had turned away to a window, that she might read this letter unobserved by Lord Hurdly, who had considerately walked to the other end of the room.

When at last she approached him and gave him back the letter, she was very pale, but her manner was wholly without indecision and her voice was resolute as she said:

"I thank you, Lord Hurdly, for the service which you have rendered me. This letter has made my future course quite clear. I shall write to your cousin to-day that everything is at an end between us. And now will you be good enough to leave me? I wish to make my arrangements to return to America at once."

Even as she said the words, the bitter barrenness of this prospect—the old dull life, without the dear presence which had been its one and sufficient palliation—rose before her mind and ap-

palled her. Perhaps Lord Hurdly saw in her face some change of expression which he construed as favorable to himself, for he hastened to say :

"Will you not, before taking so rash a step, consider the proposal which I have made to you? I can offer you the substance of which the other was only the shadow, and I can pledge to you the stable and unalterable devotion of a man who has lived long enough to know his own mind, and who declares to you that you are the only woman whom he has ever desired to put in the position of his wife."

It was impossible not to feel some consciousness of satisfaction at a tribute which her own knowledge of facts convinced her to be sincere, but Bettina's heart and mind were still too preoccupied to meet him in the way he wished. She repeated her request that he would leave her, and so earnest and distressed was her manner that he complied, leaving behind him an impression of the deepest solicitude for her, and the most earnest desire on his part to atone for the wrong which his kinsman had done her.

Bettina threw herself upon the lounge and abandoned herself to a fit of weeping—so overwhelming, so despairing, so heart-breaking that

she could scarcely believe that she, who had thought that all her power of deep suffering had been exhausted, could still find it in her to care so much for any other grief.

The worst of it was that, now it was quite evident that she was forever divided from Horace, the charm of his manner and appearance, the tenderness of his love-making, came back to her with a power which they had never exercised upon her in reality. Never, surely, had a man existed who was, to appearance at least, more frank, sincere, ardent, and deeply in love than he had seemed to be with her. It made his perfidy appear the greater. Nothing but the sight of that letter could have made her believe it; but that, taken in connection with the rareness and coolness of his recent letters to her, made it all too plain that the ardent flame of his love had burned out, and that he had repented his impetuosity, now that he had had time to think of the sacrifice which it entailed.

This was indeed great for a man in his position, ambitious in his career, and with his foot already on the ladder that led to success. She even began to doubt whether he would have fulfilled his obligations to her when it came to the point.

She got out his letters and read them over. How passionately loving were the early ones—how cool and constrained the more recent! The contrast struck her far more now in the light of recent events. It really seemed as if he might be trying to get out of the engagement.

At this thought pride came to her rescue. She felt herself grow hard and cold, and her composure returned completely. She would never let him know what she had heard, for that might make it seem as if she gave him up from compulsion. She sat down and wrote quickly a few formal sentences, saying that she had mistaken her own feelings, and that she wished to break the engagement. She added that she was returning immediately to America, as indeed she was intending to do at the time of the writing of this letter.

After it had gone, and was on its way to St. Petersburg, a mental condition of such abject misery settled down upon her that the thought of the endless days and nights of idle monotony which would be her lot if she returned home, and the awful void of her mother's absence, became intolerable. She could not do it. She must find some way of escape from such a fate.

Just as she was casting about for such a way,

Lord Hurdly came to see her. The escape which he offered had in it many elements of the strongest attractiveness for her. Since she could not be happy, as she believed, why might she not get from life the satisfaction which comes from the holding of a great position, the opportunity of being admired and wielding a powerful influence? It was a prospect which had always charmed her; and now, with no alternative but lonely isolation and bitter weariness, was it strange that she decided to accept Lord Hurdly's offer?

And if it was to be, what need was there to wait? Wounded in her pride as she was by the revelation of Horace which she had received, she relished the idea of becoming at once what he had proposed to make her—and afterward repented of. She was fully convinced in her mind that he had repented, and her blood beat faster as she thought of his consternation on hearing of this marriage. She felt eager that he should hear of it at once.

And so indeed he did. On the heels of his receipt of Bettina's letter her marriage to Lord Hurdly was announced by cable—not to him, but through the newspapers.

Then into his heart there entered also the ex-

ceeding bitterness of a lost ideal. She became to him, as he had become to her, the image of broken faith, capricious feeling, and overweening worldly ambition.

Yet in the heart of the man, who had loved completely and supremely, as Bettina never had, there was a feeling which made him say to himself, with a conviction which he knew to be immutable, that marriage was not for him. The present Lord Hurdly had said the same, and had changed his mind. For himself he knew that he should not, for all of love that he was capable of feeling had been given to the woman who had cast him off.

CHAPTER IV

BETTINA had gone through her first London season as Lady Hurdly, and certainly no girl's ambitious dreams could have forecast a more brilliant experience. She had been far too ignorant to imagine such subtle delights of the senses as resulted from the wealth and eminence which she had attained to in marrying Lord Hurdly. And beyond the mere sensuous appeal which was made to her by the wearing of magnificent clothes and jewels, and the being always surrounded with objects of beauty and means of luxury, she had the greater delight of having her feverishly active mind continually supplied with a stimulus, which it now more than ever needed. This was furnished by the innumerable social demands made upon her, and the complete power which she felt within herself to respond to them not only creditably, but in a way that should make even Lord Hurdly wonder at her.

True, she had had no social training, and in a less powerful position she might have shown her ignorance and incapacity, for she would then have had to take a personal supervision of the things which she now left utterly alone, and which, being essential to be done, were done—how and by whom she did not ask. Lord Hurdly had so long done the honors of his house without a wife that it was natural to him to continue the direction of household affairs, with the aid of the accomplished assistants who were in his employment; so Bettina had no more to do with such matters than if she had become the mistress of a royal household. At the proper time she showed herself at Lord Hurdly's side, and she had beauty enough and wit enough not only to do credit to that high position, but to cast a glory over it which he knew in his heart no other Lady Hurdly of them all had ever done.

That she enjoyed it, who could doubt that saw her, day after day and evening after evening, beautifying with her presence the social gatherings at her own splendid house, and at those of the new acquaintances who sought her society and distinguished her with their attentions wherever she might go.

Having had no experience of wealth, it never

seemed to occur to her that it could have its definite limit, and she ordered costumes and invented ways of spending money which sometimes surprised her lord, but which also pleased him. His fortune was so large, and had been so long without such demands upon it, that it was a source of genuine satisfaction to him to see that Bettina knew how to avail herself of her brilliant opportunity. Save and except a wife, he was already possessed of every adjunct that could do credit to his name and position, and in marrying Bettina he had been largely influenced by the fact that she was qualified to supply this one deficiency with a distinction which no other woman he had ever seen could have bestowed upon the position.

So, to the world, Bettina seemed completely satisfied, and in the worldly sense she was so. In this sense, also, Lord Hurdly seemed and was satisfied in his marriage. How it was with them in their hearts no one knew, and perhaps there was no one who cared to know. The one being to whom this question was of strong interest was very far away. He had shifted his position from Russia to India about the time of his cousin's marriage, and Bettina never heard his name mentioned, nor did she ever utter it.

After the London season was over, Lord and

Lady Hurdly had moved from their town-house to the family seat, Kingdon Hall. Here, after a day's stop, Lord Hurdly had left her, to return to town on some public business ; and so, for the first time since her marriage, she had a few days to herself. Later they were to have the house filled with guests, and after that to make some visits ; so this time of solitude was not likely to be repeated soon. Bettina was surprised at herself to see how eagerly she clutched at it. It was, in some faint degree, like the feeling which she had had after the rare and short separations from her mother—a longing to get back to the familiar and the accustomed. She now felt somewhat the same longing to get back to herself. She had done her part in all that brilliant pageant like a woman in a dream. She had enjoyed it, for power and admiration were very dear to her, and she had revelled in their fresh first-fruits. But she had not been herself for so long, had not for so long looked herself in the face and searched her own heart, that she did not know herself much more familiarly than she knew the other brilliant personages who moved beside her across the crowded stage of London life.

It was unaccountable even to herself how she

rejoiced at the idea of these few days of quiet and solitude. Nora, her old nurse, was of course with her still, with a French maid to assist her and perform the important functions of the toilet of which the elderly woman was ignorant. This maid Bettina sent off on a holiday, so that she might have only Nora about her.

The morning after her arrival at Kingdon, Bettina, having breakfasted in her room, went for a ramble over the house. It seemed solemnly vast and empty, and she would have lost herself many times had she not encountered now and then a courtesying house-maid or an obsequious footman, who answered her inquiries and told her into what apartments she had strayed.

"Show me the way to the picture-gallery," she said to one of these, "and then tell the housekeeper to come to me there presently."

She had taken a fancy to this white-haired old woman the night before, when Lord Hurdly had presented the servants to their new mistress in the great hall, where they had all been assembled to receive her on her arrival.

In a few moments she found herself alone in the stately gallery, going from picture to picture. On one side was a long line of the ladies of Kingdon Hall, painted by contemporary artists,

each celebrated in his era. At the end of this line her own portrait, done by a celebrated French painter who had come to London for the purpose, had recently been put in place.

It was a magnificent thing in its manner as well as in its subject, and the costume which Lord Hurdly's taste had conceived for her and a French milliner had carried out was a marvel of rich effects. As she paused in front of it her lips parted, and she said, whispering to herself,

"Lady Hurdly—the present Lady Hurdly! And what has become of Bettina?"

As she asked herself this question she sighed.

A sudden instinct made her move away. She wanted to escape from Lady Hurdly. She had a chance to be herself to-day, and she felt a strong desire to make the most of it.

Hearing a sound at her side, she turned and found the serious, pleasant face of the housekeeper near her.

"Good-morning, my lady," she said, gently, in answer to Bettina's friendly salutation. "Will your ladyship not have a shawl? This room is always cool, no matter what the weather is."

Bettina declined the wrap, but passed on to the next picture, requesting the woman to come with her and act as cicerone.

"What is your name? I ought to know it," she said.

"Parlett, your ladyship."

"And how long have you lived here, Parlett?"

"Over forty years, my lady. I was here in the old lord's time. That is his picture, with his lady next to him."

Bettina looked with interest at the two pictures designated.

"He is thought to be very much like his present lordship," said the housekeeper.

"Yes, I see it," said Bettina, feeling an instinct to guard her countenance. Here were the same keen eyes, the same resolute jaw, the same thin lips and hard lines about the mouth. Only in the older face they were yet more accentuated, and instead of the not unbecoming thinness of hair which showed in the son, there was a frank expanse of bald head which made his features all the harder.

Hurrying away from the contemplation of this portrait, Bettina turned to its companion. Here she encountered a face and form which were truly all womanly, if by womanliness is meant abject submission and self-effacement. The poor little lady looked patiently hopeless, and her deprecating air seemed the last in the world cal-

culated to hold its own against such a lord. That she had not done so—of her own full surrender of herself, in mind and soul and body—the picture seemed a plain representation.

"Poor woman! She looks as if she had suffered," said Bettina.

"Oh yes, my lady," Parlett answered, as if divided between the inclination to talk and the duty to be silent.

"She was unhappy, then?" said Bettina. "You need not hesitate to answer. His lordship has told me what a trusted servant of the family you are, and I shall treat you as such. You need not fear to speak to me quite freely."

"Yes, my lady, she had a great deal of sadness in her life," went on the housekeeper, thus encouraged. "She had six daughters before she had a son, and this was naturally a disappointment to his lordship. One after the other these children died, which grieved her ladyship sorely, for she was a very devoted mother. His lordship had never noticed them much, being angry at not having an heir, and this made my lady all the fonder of them. She had little constitution herself, and the children were sickly. At last, however, an heir was born, but her ladyship died at his birth. It seemed a pity, my lady, did it

not? For his lordship was greatly pleased with the heir, and, of course, my lady would have been much happier after that."

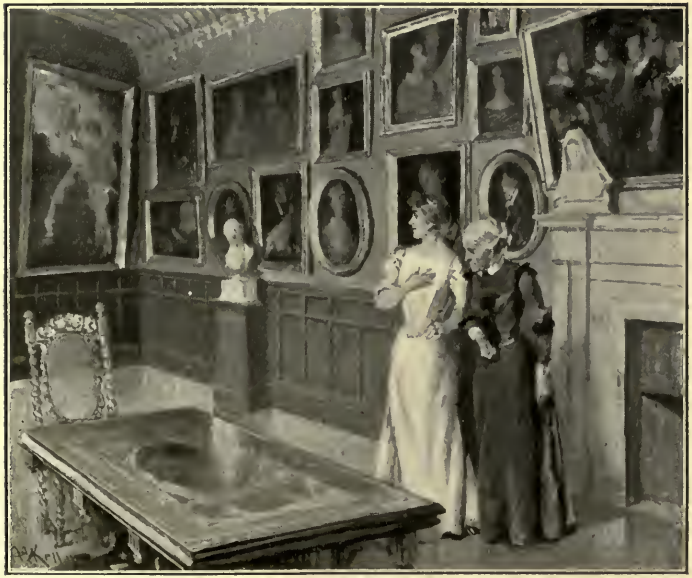
Bettina did not answer. The evident reasonableness of the father's position, in the eyes of this good and gentle woman, made it impossible for her to speak without dissent to such an atrocity as Lord Hurdly's attitude seemed to her. So she moved away, and the woman took the hint and said no more.

A little distance off, at the end of the long room, she had caught sight of an object that made her heart beat suddenly. She did no more than glance at it, and then returned to the contemplation of the picture before which she was standing. But she had recognized Horace Spotswood in the tall stripling of perhaps fifteen who stood in riding-clothes at the side of a pawing gray horse.

By the time she had made her way to it, in its regular succession, she had quite recovered her calmness and had made up her mind as to her course.

"And who is this handsome boy?" she said, with perfect self-possession, as they stood before the large canvas.

"That is Mr. Horace, my lady," said the wom-



"'AND WHO IS THIS HANDSOME BOY?'"

an, a sudden tone of emotion mingling with the deference in her voice as her eyes dwelt on the picture fondly.

And who could wonder at this? Surely a more winsome lad had never been seen. He was even then tall, and in his riding coat and breeches looked strangely slender, in contrast to the broad-shouldered physique which she had lately known so well. But the eyes were just the same—direct, frank, eager eyes, which looked straight at you and seemed to make a demand upon you to be as open and frank in return.

Had Bettina searched the world, she could not, as she knew, have found a more significant contrast than the comparison of the honest eyes with the guarded, cold, inscrutable ones into which it was now her lot to look so often.

"Have you known him a long time?" she asked, pleasantly, as the woman remained silent.

"Oh, since he was a little lad, my lady! We all love Mr. Horace here. He is the handsomest and kindest young gentleman in the world, and he's that good to me that I couldn't be fonder of my own son, not forgetting the difference, my lady."

Bettina detected a tone of regretfulness in the woman's voice, and also, she thought, an effort

to conceal it. If there was a feeling akin to this regret in her own heart, she also must conceal it. These allusions to the handsome, enthusiastic young fellow to whom she had promised herself in marriage had stirred her deeply. The idea of any one, servant or equal, speaking in this way of the man who was her husband, at any time in his life, gave her a nervous desire to laugh. It was followed by an equally nervous impulse to cry.

Walking ahead of the housekeeper, she gained a moment's opportunity for the recovery of her self-control, and she made good use of it.

"Parlett," she said, presently, "I do not want you to think that in marrying Lord Hurdly I have done an injury to Mr. Spotswood." In spite of herself, her voice shook at the name.

"Oh no, my lady—" began Parlett, but her mistress interrupted her, saying, quickly:

"Of course he always knew that his lordship might marry, and could not have been unprepared for such a possibility; but in order that he might feel no difference in his present position on that account, Lord Hurdly has settled on him what is really a handsome fortune—not only the income of it, but the principal also. I tell you this that you may understand that he

is none the worse off, so far as money goes, through his cousin's marriage to me."

"Yes, my lady. I understand, my lady. Thank you for telling me," said Parlett, somewhat nervously. "Of course every one knows that you have done him no harm, my lady, and we knew, of course, that his lordship would do the handsome thing by him."

Somehow these civil, reassuring words smote painfully upon Bettina's consciousness. When this woman spoke so confidently of Lord Hurdly's doing the handsome thing by his former heir, she felt it to be the hollow tribute of a conventional loyalty, and the assurance that it was understood that she herself had done him no harm grated on her also. Now that she was quite alone and free to think things out, as she had shrunk from doing heretofore, and as, in the rush of the London season, she had been able to avoid doing, she felt a sense of compunction toward Horace that seriously depressed her.

Dismissing the housekeeper, she put on a shade-hat and went for a ramble in the park. How beautiful it was! What shrubs, what trees, what undulations of rich emerald turf! She could not in the least feel that she had any right in it all. But how must a creature love it who

had looked upon its noble beauties from childhood up to youth, and on to manhood, with the belief that it would some day be his own! She could not stifle the feeling that she had wronged that being if by her marriage she should be the means of depriving him of such a fortune and position, and deep, deep down in her consciousness she had a boding fear that, if all things hidden could be revealed, it might be shown that in a keener sense than this she had also wronged him.

For marriage had been in many ways an illumination to Bettina. The revelation of her own heart which it had given her was one which she tried hard to shut her eyes to. Twice she had consented to the idea of marrying without love. Once she had actually done this thing. Only her own heart knew what had been the consequences to her. But of one thing she had often felt glad. This was that she had not entered into a loveless marriage with a man who had loved her as she had believed Horace did at the time he had so ardently wooed her. From such a wrong as that might she be delivered!

As her thoughts now dwelt on Horace and the circumstances of their brief past together, the memory of his honest, tender, self-forgetful atti-

tude toward her recurred to her half wistfully, in contrast to her recent experiences. Lord Hurdly's manner toward her had, in truth, changed from the very hour of their marriage. He no longer had the air of a solicitous suitor, but took at once that of the assured husband and master. It made her think what she had heard of his father and of his poor little mother's history. Not that she could fancy herself becoming, under any circumstances, a Griselda; though she could without difficulty imagine him in his father's *rôle*.

But what right had she, she asked herself, to expect to reap where she had not sown? She had married for money and position, and she had got them. What more had she expected?

Nothing more, perhaps; but in one point she had been disappointed—namely, in the power of these things to give her what she longed for, and what she could define only under the indefinite term happiness.

CHAPTER V

BETTINA'S talk with Parlett had set her mind to working very actively in a direction in which she had not allowed it to stray before. The thought of Horace always brought a sense of pain and spiritual discomfort to her, which she instinctively desired to shake off; and in the restless whirl of London life, which left her little time for thought of any kind, she had not much difficulty in doing so.

Now, however, she had nothing to do but to think and to become acquainted with her new possessions, the latter occupation being a strong stimulus to the former. There were many associations with Horace at Kingdon Hall. It was extraordinary how many things that he had told her in connection with this place came back to her. She was constantly recognizing pictures or persons or names with which he had made her familiar. The persons were, of course, the servants, steward, tenants, and the like, for she had

seen no others. Even in walking about the lawn she had found his initials cut on trees, and the very dogs which joined her when she would go out for her walks had names on their collars that she knew. There was one, a magnificent Great Dane, which bore Horace's name there as well as his own. This dog, Comrade, she had heard Horace speak of with a special affection.

True, Kingdon Hall had never been Horace's home, but he had grown up with the idea that it might be, and since coming to manhood had felt wellnigh secure that it would be. All his life he had been in the habit of making visits here, and the impression which he had left behind him was almost surprising to Bettina.

The place in which this impression was strongest was in the hearts of the servants. Bettina, through Nora, had assured herself of this. The devoted servant, who had the sole object in life of serving her beloved mistress, had, by Bettina's orders, informed herself on this point, and all that she gathered in the servants' hall she retailed to Bettina in her room. Nora, like every one else, had been won by Horace's manner and appearance, but, of course, when her mistress had drawn off from him, she had no idea of anything but acceptance of the changed conditions. Still,

she was inwardly delighted when Bettina explained to her how anxious she was to learn all that she could about Mr. Horace, so that she might lose no opportunity of furthering his interest with Lord Hurdly, and making up to him, as far as possible, for having disappointed him in his worldly prospects by marrying his cousin.

That he could hold her accountable for any other wrong to him she did not admit. At times the memory of his fresh and buoyant youth, in so great contrast to the jaded maturity of his cousin, knocked at the door of her heart, and the ardent expressions of his worshipping, passionate love for her echoed there with a distinctness that amazed her.

Surely he had loved her—this she could not doubt. But if his love had been so slight that a few months of absence had cooled it, and of so poor a quality that a new caprice had taken its place so soon, she was well rid of it. That this had been so the letter which Lord Hurdly had shown her sufficiently attested, and she must guard herself against the folly of sentimental regrets.

It was not Horace that she regretted. It was only the ideal of the love between man and woman which her brief intercourse with him had

held up to her. She had seen love in a different guise since then—or what went by the name of love—and surely the contrast must have had a deeper root than the mere difference between youth and middle-age.

It was not often that Bettina allowed herself to think of these things. But now, in her solitude and idleness, visions would come of the eager lover, strong as a young Narcissus, who represented love in such a simple, wholesome guise—or at least so it had seemed to be. Then she would shake off the image, and tell herself it was but seeming, as the result had proved, and so she would accuse herself of weakness and sentimentality. These thoughts were getting to be inconvenient. They haunted her too persistently, and at last she began to wish for the time to come when her days would again be too crowded with engagements for her to indulge in such foolish reflections.

The truth was, deep down in Bettina's heart there was a fear which she could not wholly still in any waking hour. She could and did refuse to recognize it, even in her own soul; but there it was, and there it remained, to rise again and again, and almost stifle her with the sinister possibility which it suggested.

This fear was based upon the clearer knowledge of Lord Hurdly's character which had come to her since marriage. She had found in him an inexorable resolution to have what he wanted in life, which had rendered him, more than once within her knowledge, unscrupulous as to the means he used in the securing of his ends. This it was which had planted in her mind the awful though remote possibility of his having been, in some manner, insincere in his representations of Horace's nature and character.

But then there was the letter from his friend which she had seen with her own eyes, with the St. Petersburg mark, so familiar to her, on the envelope, and which had been written by a person who could not have known that she would ever see it. Surely that was enough to settle all doubts as to the character and conduct of the man to whom she had first pledged herself in marriage, and she had at least the satisfaction of knowing that her present husband could be charged with no such faults. His indifference to her sex was proverbial in society, and that she alone, of all the women he had seen—so many of whom had angled for him openly—had been able to do away with his aversion to marriage was a tribute in which she could not help

feeling a certain pride, the more so as she saw every day new proofs of his fastidiousness, as well as his importance.

So she stifled this dread suggestion and forced her thoughts into other channels. This was to be more easily accomplished when her body was actively employed; so she took long rides on horseback, attended by a groom, or long walks in the park alone. In these walks Horace's big dog Comrade would often join her. The creature had taken a fancy to her, which seemed, in some strange way, to comfort her.

Besides these diversions, she had her large correspondence to dispose of every day; for in her important position she had of course established numberless points of contact with the world.

So the time went by until Lord Hurdly's return, and the day that followed saw Kingdon Hall filled with guests. After that there were few moments of reflection for its mistress, as the duty of doing the honors of this great establishment demanded all her time.

CHAPTER VI

BETTINA loved this power and importance. The drama of her present life was like the unfolding, before her gaze, of a beautiful series of pictures which she had conceived in her imagination, and which some enchanter's word had turned into reality. The crowded functions of the London season had somewhat palled upon her, though she had not quite owned it to herself; but here she was the centre of the system, the light around which these lesser lights revolved, and she seemed, under these conditions, to shine with an increased radiance. Her manners, where they differed from those of the women about her, seemed to gain rather than lose by the contrast, and her costumes seemed to be endless in their variety as well as in their beauty. Certainly she had an air of being born to the purple, and her husband's pride in her was undoubted, if unexpressed.

Bettina was aware that this pride was his

strongest feeling in regard to her, and she was abundantly willing to have it so. If she had found it difficult to fall in love with a youth who might have disturbed the heart of Diana, she was not likely to have fallen in love with the cool, cynical, narrow-chested, thin-haired man whom she could yet feel a certain pride in owning as her husband, since his appearance, no less than his name, was distinguished. She had always had a theory that she would never love deeply any one besides her mother, and her two experiences in the lottery of marriage, so different as they were, convinced her that her knowledge of herself had been correct. She was glad of it. The hot anguish which at times even yet contracted her heart at the thought of her mother made her hope devoutly that she would never love again. The joy of it could not be worth the pain.

When Lady Hurdly's house-party broke up, she went with her husband on a round of visits to other country-houses. This phase of society she liked, and she threw herself into it with ardor. But toward the end she wearied of these visits, as she had wearied of London, and was glad to get back to Kingdon Hall. Instead of rest, however, she found restlessness, and the disturbing

thoughts which she had smothered before came back with added force. It was a relief to her to think of going abroad — Lord Hurdly having made plans for their spending some months of the winter on the Continent.

There was one instinctive fear connected with this plan—the possibility that she might by some chance encounter Horace. She had little fear that he would come to England. What would it matter if she should meet him? He had never been anything to her, really—so she assured herself—and she had certainly been, in reality, quite as little to him. Yet she did unreasonably dread such a meeting with him, and felt anxious to know where he was.

Accordingly, one morning she asked Parlett, in a casual way, if she ever heard from Mr. Horace.

"Oh yes, my lady; he writes to me now and then," replied the housekeeper. Bettina had not expected to hear this; her only thought was to draw out some information gained by hearsay.

"He is at St. Petersburg?" she asked, indifferently.

"No, my lady; at Simla," was the unexpected answer. "He has been there a good while. I had a pamphlet from him the other day. When

he has not time to answer my letters, he often sends me a paper, or something like that, to show me what he has been doing. I can't always understand them, but he knows I like to have them just because he wrote them."

Bettina was unwilling to show her ignorance, so she did not say that she had no knowledge that he ever wrote for publication, and when Parlett went on to offer her the reading of the pamphlet she said, with an indifferent kindness,

"Yes, bring it to me, by all means. I am very glad that Mr. Horace keeps up his intercourse with the old place, which of course may yet be his. I shall take an interest in seeing what he writes."

She went on to speak of certain changes which she wished made in some of the sleeping-apartments, and then dismissed her housekeeper with something less than her usual graciousness of manner.

Bettina felt a strong desire to be alone. These tidings of Horace, slight as they were, had been disturbing to her. Indeed, as time went on and her knowledge of Lord Hurdly increased, the fear that he might have dealt insincerely with his cousin or with herself grew steadily. She saw proofs every day of the ruthlessness with

which he sacrificed men, and even what should have been principles, to gain his ends. By the light of the same knowledge she realized how his meeting with her had disturbed him in his customary calmness of poise, and she argued from this fact how important it had been to him to gain his object of making her his wife.

In the midst of these reflections a house-maid tapped at her door, with some folded papers on a tray.

"If you please, my lady, Mrs. Parlett sends you these," she said.

She was a sweet-faced, rosy-cheeked English girl, with a soft voice and very pretty manner, and at present she was gently agitated by the privilege of speaking to her lady, whom she, as well as all the rest of the maids, regarded as a sort of cross between angel and goddess.

Bettina thanked her with a kind smile which sent her away completely happy; then, in the privacy of her own chamber, she opened the papers. One was a diplomatic pamphlet on a public question in the line of the writer's professional work. The other was an article which went very thoroughly into the question of the best means of relieving the famine then raging in India.

It seemed to Bettina that she had vaguely heard that there was such a famine, but she had not felt more than a kindly casual interest in it as an unfortunate matter which she could not help. Now, however, as she read the account which this paper gave, and the lines which it followed in the effort to render help, her heart burned within her. Here was a man who had no more power than herself to give money help—far less, indeed, perhaps. Yet how he was spending his soul, his strength, his time, his talent, his very heart-beats, on this effort to go to the rescue of these perishing thousands! No one who read the throbbing sentences of that paper could have a doubt of the writer's earnest desire to help, or of his ability to move the hearts and wills of others to come to his aid. It wrought upon her strangely.

How much money could she lay her hands on? She had no idea, but she would make it her business to find out. There was her own little income, which she had taken no account of since her marriage, and there was the money which Lord Hurdly had put to her credit in the bank. She would get all she could and send it—anonymously, of course—to the famine fund which she had casually heard mentioned. But, oh, what a

pitiful offering it seemed compared with what this man was giving with such lavish self-devotion! From the fervor of his printed words, and his report of what had so far been accomplished, she saw that the very passion of his heart was in it. Of his ardent temperament, his quick sympathies, she had knowledge in her own experience. Perhaps it had been these very traits of his which had led him to the conduct which had separated them.

At this thought, that faint suspicion that he had been misrepresented to her rose in her heart again; but she choked it back. That would be too awful. Besides the hideous self-accusations which would have followed the admission of this doubt, there was another argument against it which still had its powerful hold on her. She had grown accustomed to her great position in the social world, and her inborn instinct for power and admiration was deliciously gratified by the brilliancy of her present circumstances. She found it very agreeable to be Lady Hurdly, with all that that name and title implied, and she did not, even in this moment of such unwonted emotion, lose sight of that fact.

Yet the reading of this little paper had stirred a feeling in Bettina's heart which she had not

felt for so long a time—a yearning tenderness for some object outside herself: a longing that her health and strength might avail for others bereft of these blessings. It was akin to the emotion she had felt by her mother's dying bed, and as it swept over her she wept as she had not done since she had knelt beside that sacred spot.

Instinctively now she fell upon her knees. She tried to pray—but for what? She could not compose a form of prayer or articulate a definite wish. All she could do was to pray to God—the God in whom her mother had trusted—to give her this thing, this unknown boon which He knew her passionate need of.

When she rose from her knees she put her hands to her head, and, pressing her temples hard, looked about her, as if in search of some object which might help her to the comprehension of her own mood. Then, running her fingers inside the collar of her dress, she drew out, by a slight chain, a small locket, which contained her mother's picture and a lock of her white hair. It was a sort of talisman whose mere touch gave her a sense of comfort. She did not open it now, but held it between her palms and pressed her cheek against it, standing there alone, and presently she whispered:—

"What is it, mother darling? What is it that you seem trying to say to me? Oh, if you can ever speak to me, speak now, and I will listen as I did not do when you were here beside me! There is something that I ought to do, and I am not doing it. There is something I am doing which distresses you. That is the feeling that I have. Oh, my mother—my lovely, precious, good, good mother—if I had you here, you would tell me what it is that I ought to do—and I would do it!"

She ceased her half-inarticulate whispers, and stood intensely still—almost, it seemed, as if she waited for an answer to them.

But there came no answer save the still, small voice within her soul, which had so often tried to speak before, and which even yet she could not, would not listen to.

This voice suggested to her with persistent iteration that she should even now look strictly into the evidence which had so quickly sufficed to convince her that the young and ardent lover who had wooed her so passionately, and promised her such loyalty and faith and devotion, had been false to his professions and his promises alike.

Suppose she should investigate; suppose she

should get proof that she as well as he had been falsely dealt with, that he had been true in every word and thought—what then? Could she endure to keep, after that, the position of wife to the man who had so deceived and injured two beings who had believed him? Assuredly she could not. What, then, would be her alternative? To leave him and go back to the poor life at home, which her mother's presence had justified and glorified, but which without that presence, and with the contrast of her present position in her mind, would be too intolerable a thought to contemplate.

No, she had no sufficient reason to doubt the representations that her husband had made to her. She would try to accept them more implicitly for the future, and so fight against such disturbing ideas. There were ample means of diversion within her reach. Her sojourn abroad would soon begin, and she must fight against any recurrence of her present mood of weakness.

If she was to win this fight, however, there was one precaution which she felt that she must take. This was to avoid the very name of Horace Spotswood, and, as far as might be possible, every thought of him as well.

Her foreign travels began, and she then had

the assurance that this effort would not be difficult of accomplishment. There were a thousand new issues for Bettina's interest and feelings in her constantly changing surroundings, and these were sufficiently absorbing to do away with lately disturbing considerations. The world had still its powerful charm for Bettina, and she was now seeing the world in a very fascinating aspect.

CHAPTER VII

AS Bettina had found the London season delightful, and yet had been quite content to see it close, and as the same had been true of her experience, both as hostess and as guest, at the country-house parties which had followed the season, so it was also with her foreign travels, although she found much to interest and delight her in the various cities which she visited with Lord Hurdly. He was received with distinction everywhere—a fact partly due to his prominent position in Parliament, and partly to his social importance and the acknowledged beauty of his wife.

Bettina enjoyed it, certainly, and found it very helpful to her in carrying out her resolve to banish the agitating thoughts which would recur whenever she thought of Horace. She had managed to stop thinking of him almost entirely, and to live only for the satisfaction of each day as it passed.

After a while, however, she began to feel that there was a certain flatness in the sort of pleasure which consisted so largely in being an object of admiration, for she had not been able herself to feel much enthusiasm for the people whom she met. She did not make friends easily, perhaps because she did not greatly care to have friends. Her mother's delicate health had left her little time for other companionships, even if she had desired them, and since the loss of her mother her heart had seemed to close up, and her capacity for caring for people, never very great, was lessening every day.

Several times during her travels she had heard Horace spoken of. On these occasions she had not betrayed the fact that she had any knowledge of him, and so the talk about him had been quite unrestrained. She had heard it said by one man that "he was turning out a very earnest fellow"; by another that "his pamphlets were making quite a stir"; and, again, that he "might do something worth while in diplomacy if he'd let philanthropy alone." Another man had said that "all he needed was to marry money, and he'd have a great career before him."

When Bettina returned from her travels these

few remarks, overheard at dinner-tables or in public places, seemed in some unaccountable way to be the most important things she had secured out of her late experiences. Certainly they were the most insistently recurring, and the idea was forced upon her that the way in which men spoke of Horace Spotswood was a strong contrast to the tone of the letter from Lord Hurdly's friend.

All this was a source of distress to her. She would have preferred to believe the letter, for such a belief would have rid her of the sting of self-reproach; but, try as she might, she could not wholly get her consent to it.

On her way back to England she stopped in Paris to choose her costumes for the coming season. It was a pleasure to her to try on these beautiful things, which she bought without any thought of the cost of them; but it was a pleasure which she had become accustomed to, and so its keenness was gone. Besides this, she had nothing to look forward to except the London season, and custom had also detracted from the zest of that. She was in the attitude of always looking beyond. Surely, with such a position and such a fortune as she had attained to, there must be something to satisfy the vague longing

within her which she called desire for happiness.

It was decided that they were to stay at Kingdon Hall a short time before going up to town, and Bettina had looked forward to the freedom of the country life with a hopefulness which reality disappointed. Here again she thought of Horace, and the possible injustice she had done him forced its way into her consciousness, and so disturbed her with doubts and misgivings that she determined to overcome her reluctance to mention Horace's name to her husband, and ask boldly whether he had actually received the sum of money which she had been promised that he should have. It had become so essential to her to know about this that she determined to use her very first opportunity of asking.

Not ten minutes after she had made this resolution she unexpectedly encountered Lord Hurdly, in crossing a hall. He had been out on horseback, and still wore his riding-clothes. The correct and carefully fitted leggings showed legs that were thin and shapeless. Beneath them were small feet, on which their owner did not step very firmly. The somewhat showy waistcoat and short coat had an air of displaying themselves and concealing the form beneath

them, which was perhaps a high tribute to his tailor's art. His chest looked narrower, his face more wrinkled, his hair thinner, than Bettina had before noticed them to be, and there was a certain loose-jointedness in his figure which, as he moved toward her on his narrow and closely booted feet, gave him the sort of teetering motion of the elderly beau. His face, neutral and cold as ever, showed the signs of age less, yet Bettina felt that it masked the inadequacy of his soul as distinctively as his clothes masked that of his body.

As they came toward each other—this man and this woman, whose marriage was supposed to be a union of two into one—the face of each might, by an eye sensitive to the subtleties of human expression, have been seen to harden slightly. Lord Hurdly took off his hat with an automatic motion which might have prompted the thought that the action arose from his ideal of himself rather than from any association with the woman before him.

"Excuse me for detaining you a moment," said Bettina, "but I want to know whether Horace Spotswood actually received the money which you made over to him at the time of your marriage to me. I have heard that he is leading a

very active life, on lines where money will be of great use to him. Naturally I am anxious to be sure of the fact that he has suffered no injury, however indirectly, through me."

She had been able to control both her voice and expression entirely—a fact on which she fervently congratulated herself.

"You may feel quite at ease on that score, I assure you," Lord Hurdly answered, in his cold, incisive tones. "He received the money, and has probably used it for the furtherance of these ridiculous and sentimental schemes of his. This should give you the gratifying assurance that he has been bettered, and not worsted, by reason of his connection with you."

The tone in which he spoke was galling to Bettina, but she made no answer, though no words which she could have spoken would have conveyed a greater resentment of his speech than did her disdainful silence. She made a motion to move away, but he deliberately placed himself in front of her, saying, in the same hard tone:

"It occurred to me, from time to time while we were abroad, that you were rather eager in gleaning information about the person we have been speaking of, and I want to tell you that what has been evident to me may be evident to others.

You may not care how the thing looks, but as I do, perhaps you will be more careful in the future."

His use of the word "eager" in connection with her attitude in this affair gave Bettina swift offence, and this feeling was heightened by the suggestion that she had made herself liable to criticism on such a subject.

"You cannot, I think," she answered, in a tone of proud resentment, "be more careful than I am that I shall act with propriety as your wife. Since there is so little besides the form to be complied with, I see the greater necessity for punctiliousness in observing that. The rebuke you have just given me is utterly unmerited, and I shall therefore not change my manner of conducting myself in any particular."

"Perhaps you will think better of that decision, and will oblige me by not making yourself conspicuous by holding your breath to listen whenever that person chances to be mentioned. You are not unlikely to hear him alluded to during the coming season, as he has been making a bid for popularity at his new post by taking up the matter of the famine, and," he added with a sneering smile, "relieving it with the money I paid him."

The word cut into Bettina's heart.

"Paid him ?" she said, scrutinizing him with a glance before which even his hard eyes faltered. "Paid him for what ?"

"Oh, for keeping himself out of my way !"

She felt that she had compelled him to this response, and that he would have liked to put it more brutally. As it was, there lurked a sting in it which provoked her to reply.

"Did he hold the privilege of your proximity at so large a price ?"

A smile of quiet irony accompanied the words. As it curved her lips alluringly, Lord Hurdly felt himself touched with the sudden sense of her powerful charm. No one else on earth would have dared to say this to him, or anything remotely comparable with it. There was something very piquant to his jaded palate in the flavor of this audacious speech. Instead of scowling, therefore, he smiled.

"I have heard," he said, amiably, "that America was the land of the free and the home of the brave, and certainly you seem to warrant one in accepting that belief."

Bettina, a good deal relieved at this turn of affairs, took the opportunity that the moment gave her to say, gravely :

"No; I do not consider myself free. I have bound myself, in my marriage to you, and I have no intention or desire to forget the duties which I owe you. But I tell you frankly, Lord Hurdly, that I am not accustomed to either surveillance or tyranny, and I shall not tamely submit to them. In the carrying out of this resolution, at least, you will find that I can be brave."

She looked more than ordinarily beautiful as she stood erect before him and said these words, and he had not gazed so fully into her eyes for a long time. He had almost forgotten their magnetic loveliness. At sight of them now his pulses beat quicker. A desire for the mastery of this splendid creature returned to him with a force he would not have believed possible.

"Bettina," he said, in a voice which showed an emotion most unusual to him, "have you ever known what it was to love, I wonder?"

"Once—once only," she answered, a quaver in her voice and a sudden suffusion of tears in her eyes. "I loved my mother. No one that ever lived could have loved more truly and more ardently than I loved her; but there it began and ended. I never deceived you as to that. I promised you duty and good faith, and I have

not failed in these. I never shall so fail. But love, no! I haven't it to give."

She made a movement to go forward, and he stood aside and let her pass him. She avoided meeting his gaze, and perhaps it was well that she did. For slowly its expression changed. A look of hardness that was almost significant of dislike came into his eyes and compressed his lips. From the day of their marriage this woman had thwarted and baffled him. He had tried to get the mastery of her, but he had failed, and the sense of that failure angered him. He had been used to dominating every one with whom he came into any sort of close contact. He had married this American girl with the determination to dominate her, and he had found himself as powerless as if she had been a mist maiden. There was no way in which he could lay hold upon her.

Concerning Bettina's attitude toward him he had a theory. He believed that she had really loved Horace. She was too absolutely in the shadow of the sorrow of her mother's death to give full play to any other feeling, but he had always felt, in every effort that he had made to win her, that it was the image of Horace Spotswood in her mind which put him in total eclipse.

This theory time had deepened. His suspicious watchfulness over her every word and look had made him aware that she listened with interest when Horace's name was mentioned, and his imagination heightened the effect of her interest, and caused him to conjecture as to what she might have heard and felt at such times as he was not by. Moreover, a certain secret consciousness in his own soul stimulated him in his suspicions.

CHAPTER VIII

DURING the early weeks of their marriage Lord Hurdly, while changing his attitude from the solicitude of the pursuer to the masterfulness of the possessor, had certainly made some effort to win Bettina, while she, on her part, had tried to oblige him by responding to his professions for her. Both were aware that this effort had been made on both sides, and that it had quite failed. By the time the honey-moon was over, Lord Hurdly had, to all appearance, ceased to care. The consciousness of this was an immense relief to Bettina, and she had felt ever since that in doing him credit in the eyes of the world she would satisfy his first object in having her for a wife. In this she had not failed. There was a distinct estrangement between them, but it had never been necessary to define it. Whatever disagreements there had been, only themselves were aware of. Lord Hurdly would have felt his authority over her

incomplete indeed if he had ever had to assert it in public.

As for Bettina, a singular change of feeling was going on within her. She had made her test of the world, and found that she had overrated its power to please. It was almost appalling to reflect that there was no more for her to do than to repeat what she had already done. Another London season, another autumn in receiving and making visits, another winter abroad. What then? Was there nothing but material pleasure for her in the world? She wanted something more, something different from all this.

One morning she went out into the park, where spring was just beginning to put forth its greenery. Leaping footsteps sounded behind her. It was Comrade, bounding to her side and nestling up against her. She put her arm around his neck and drew him close. He responded with an affectionateness that was almost human.

Almost human! At this thought she began to ask herself how much human affection there was for her in the world. As much, no doubt, she told herself, as she had to bestow. But why was this?

The birds were going wild with song in the branches above her head. The grass, the trees,

the clouds, the sky, seemed all to have been made to be part of a world for love to dwell in. A great hunger possessed her—a hunger not to be loved, but to love. For the first time she found herself longing for this boon, entirely apart from any idea of her mother. Oh, to have some one with a human, comprehending, ardent heart, to put her arms around as she was now clasping Comrade—some one to whom to offer up the wealth of love which she had once thought she could never give except to her dear mother; some one who might make that mother's words come true, that a love far greater than any she had known might be in store for her; some one, handsome, charming, ardent, loving, sympathetic, kind; some one to be friend and brother and lover all in one; above all, some one with thoughts and feelings akin to her own—some one impulsive and natural—some one young!

When at last she said good-bye to Comrade and returned to her rooms, she felt in some strange way that a new era had dawned for her. But a mood like this was new in her experience, and she fought resolutely against its recurrence. As an aid to this end she threw herself more eagerly into the external interests which were so great in such a position as hers, and became more

noted for her splendid entertainments and rich dressing than she had been the season before. As she got a deeper insight into the conditions of the life about her, she saw opportunities for influence and power, even to a woman, which attracted her. But she was very ignorant. She knew little of the world and English affairs, and she found the women about her so well informed on these subjects that she began to feel herself at a certain disadvantage. This roused her pride, and she set to work to inform herself on many subjects of which she had hitherto been ignorant.

One means to this end was the reading of newspapers, and this occupation now absorbed a part of every morning. In this way she occasionally came upon Horace Spotswood's name, and when she did, a strange agitation would possess her. She could not quite shake off an influence which this man's life seemed to exert upon hers. Lord Hurdly would have had her believe that she had bestowed a great benefit upon Horace, as it was through her that he was in the possession of his present independent fortune, but there was no voice so strong as the one in her own heart which told her that she had wronged him. Here and there she had picked up the impressions of many

different people concerning this young diplomatist, and unquestionably the aggregated effect was one of admiration. The brief notices of him which she read in the papers confirmed this impression of him. He was doing well, for a man of his years, in diplomacy, and he was doing more than well in the work he had undertaken for the relief of the famine-stricken population near him.

It was Horace's interest in this cause which had given rise to Bettina's interest in it, and she began to read eagerly all that she could find on the subject. As a result her heart was, for the first time in her life, awakened to an intense perception of the suffering of the world at large. It was a new emotion to her, and one which throbbed through all her consciousness with a power which changed her individuality even to herself. She began to think for the first time of the utter recklessness with which she had been spending the large sums of money which Lord Hurdly placed at her disposal. Her expenditure of these sums heretofore had met with his entire approval, as she could never have too rich a wardrobe to please him. It was all a part of his own glory and importance, and he never asked a question as to how the money went.

But now the tide within Bettina's heart had

turned. As she read of the sufferings of these starving people, the thought of her own excess of luxuriousness sickened her. The more she felt within her soul that nameless sadness which no outside help could relieve, the more she felt it urgent upon her to relieve the wants of others when this assuagement lay within her actual power.

It may seem strange that, with a mother who had a large-hearted sympathy with all sorrow, Bettina should have kept her own heart so closed to the suffering outside it; but no seed can sprout until the soil is prepared for it, and up to this period of her life the ground of Bettina's heart had been unprepared.

Now, however, all was changed. She went to balls and dinners, as her position as Lord Hurdly's wife demanded, but her heart was elsewhere. She began to economize strictly in her personal expenditure, and collected all the ready money she could lay her hands on, both from her husband's allowance and from her own small private fortune, and sent it anonymously to the Indian famine fund.

This contribution was sent in with no other identification than "From B.," written on the card which accompanied it. How could Bettina

have dreamed that any living soul would connect her with it ?

She was not unaware, however, that she was constantly watched by her husband. Since she had become interested in her new pursuits he observed her more closely than ever, and on the morning of the publication in the papers of the special additions to the famine fund which contained her own subscription Lord Hurdly, with apparently no reason at all, read the list aloud to her across the breakfast table.

When he came to the item "From B.," he paused and looked at her searchingly.

Bettina felt her face turn red.

"I thought so," said her husband, with a strange mixture of satisfaction and anger in his hard tones. "I have been expecting some such foolery as this for some time, and I am not blinded to the motive behind it. What do you care about those devils of Indian savages ? What does Horace Spotswood care about them ? Just as little ! Enough, and too much, of my money has gone already to the prolonging of their worthless lives. If that graceless cub chooses to go on wasting money on them he can do it, but I take this occasion to inform you, Lady Hurdly—and I'd advise you to remember what I

"'THE MONEY WAS PARTLY MY OWN'"

say—that I do not choose that any more of my money shall go in that direction. Do you understand?"

There was an insolence in his tone which he had never used to her before. She resented it keenly. Rising to her feet, with an instinct which forbade her to preside over the table at the other end of which he was seated as master, she said, with a tinge of anger in her quiet tones:

"The money was partly my own—from my mother's little fortune; and she would have held, with me, that I could put it to no more holy use. As to the rest, I understood that that also was my own. I did not know that you required of me an account of how I used it."

"How you used it? You may light your fire with it, for all I care! But there is one thing for which I do care, and which I mean to see nipped in the bud; and that is this ridiculous sentimentality which you are indulging in over Horace Spotswood. If you are regretting your young lover, that is your own affair, but when you come to flaunt this regret before the eyes of the public it becomes my affair, and as such I propose to put a stop to it."

Bettina trembled with the rage of resentment

that possessed her. She recollected herself enough, however, not to speak until she had paused long enough to be sure that she could control herself. Then she said:

"You are forgetting yourself, Lord Hurdly, when you presume to speak to me as you have just done. I have given you no occasion to do so, and you know it. If there are certain regrets in my marriage to you, your present conduct justifies them. But permit me to say, on my side, that I can imagine no explanation of your behavior, except to suppose that it proceeds from a consciousness in your own mind of having wronged this man."

She was looking at him narrowly. His features did not flush, nor did his cold eyes falter. And yet, in spite of the long habit of guardedness which now stood him in such good stead, there was a consciousness about him, like an atmosphere, which told her that her thrust had drawn blood.

"I thought so!" she said, using the very words which he had used to her. "I have for a long time been struggling in my mind against a doubt which sometimes would arise, that I might have been deceived. Everywhere, in public and in private, that I hear that young man spoken of,

it is with words of confidence, admiration, and affection."

Still her penetrating gaze was on him, and still he bore it without flinching.

"You saw the letter," he said, with a sneer. "If that was not enough for you—" He broke off with a harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"It was enough," she said. "Surely it has sufficed to fix my fate in life. But it is possible that that letter gave an exaggerated account. Still, if the half of it was so, I was more than justified in cutting loose from him. No one could possibly blame me."

"No one does, so far as I can see," was the malicious answer. "I hear of no complaints from others, and certainly I have uttered none. You make a very satisfactory Lady Hurdly, and I suppose you get enough out of the position to repay you for anything you may have lost—at least, from the world's point of view, you should have done so."

Bettina did not answer at once. A sickness of soul was creeping over her that made all life look suddenly loathsome. The one feeble ray that penetrated the darkness in which she felt herself enveloped was the help that came from a certain ideal which she had recently enthroned

in her own heart. As the world's need, the wider issues affecting the myriad lives beyond her own, had recently been brought before her consciousness, she had felt her way, as simply and weakly as a child might have done, to one plain principle of life—that it was worth while to try to be good. Never had she felt so keenly as in this minute the utter futility of hoping to be happy. Yet in this minute she felt more than ever, also, that happiness was not all.

It was only rarely that she had any personal talk with her husband. The wall of separation between them seemed to be thickening by silent accretion all the time. It was very difficult to scale this wall, and she felt that any effort to do so irked him no less than it did her. So, with an instinct not to let go the present opportunity, she said, rather eagerly, as he was rising to go away:

"Sit down a moment. We do not often speak together. I have something on my mind to say to you."

He resumed his seat and lighted a cigar—an action which discouraged her by its nonchalance. Still, she was determined to go on. By a great effort she made her voice very gentle, as she said:

"I know I have disappointed you in what you had hoped from this marriage between us, and I want to tell you I am very sorry. If I have not been able to give you the feeling which you desired—"

He interrupted her.

"Feeling?" he said. "Who wants feeling nowadays in a wife? No one expects it. I wanted some one to make a handsome figure as Lady Hurdly. I expected that you would do that, and you have not disappointed me."

"If this is true, I'm glad to know it," she said; "but, at any rate, you could not blame me for not giving you the love another woman might have given you. I never deceived you as to that. I told you I had not that love to give; not—as you have so unjustly hinted—because I had given it to another man, but because I was then incapable of love. I had no thought of any one beyond myself. I was miserably ignorant and egoistic. It was in ignorance and egoism that I took the position of your wife, but I think from the first that I have tried, as I could, to fulfil its obligations. I have tried to be and to appear what you would wish. And I am not unmindful of the honor and distinction which my marriage to you has conferred upon me."

"Gad! I should hope not! One of the biggest positions in England!" he exclaimed, in a tone of scornful irritation. With these words he rose and left the room.

Bettina's pride was deeply wounded. It had been that new assertion of the control of duty which had led her to say these things to her husband. She had conquered much in herself before speaking, and she felt that she had a right to resent the almost brutal insensibility with which he had received her words.

As she turned from the breakfast-room and mounted to her own apartments she felt conscious of a new humiliation in her life. Up to this time she had believed that Lord Hurdly would have been incapable of such speech as he had used to her that morning. She had done a good deal—more than was required of her, she told herself—in speaking to him as she had done after his words in the early part of their conversation, and now it seemed plain to her that she had fulfilled her whole duty toward him, and that if it had done no good, the fault was on his side and not on hers.

Once in her own rooms, she gave herself up to profoundly sorrowful thoughts. She was only twenty-two. How long the path of her future

life looked, and whither would it lead? She had attained all that any woman could desire in the way of the world's bestowment. She did not underrate the value of this. On the contrary, it was as essential to one part of her nature as something far different in the way of human possibility was to another part. She did not lose her hold upon the actual because she was striving after the unattained. All this power and admiration was very important to her, though she felt the insufficiency of mere worldly prosperity. "Pleasure to have it, none; to lose it, pain," were words that very nearly fitted her state of mind. At the thought of going back to the obscurity she had come out of she shrank.

CHAPTER IX

THAT talk with Lord Hurdly made a distinct epoch in their relations to each other. Neither ever referred to it, but it had left its impress upon both. To Bettina it gave the assurance that she had done all that could possibly be required of her, in her desire to come to a true and amicable understanding with her husband, and, after it, she had a greater sense of freedom. To Lord Hurdly it gave an insight into Bettina's nature which he had not had before. He found her to be possessed of a power of caustic speech which, he was bound to acknowledge, had made him feel uncomfortable. He felt also that he had not succeeded in asserting his supremacy over her quite so conclusively as he could have wished. He had, moreover, an uncomfortable warning, from the recollection of her words and looks, that it might be better for him to think twice in future before crossing swords with her. He was a man who hated opposition, and who

was quite unused to dealing with it in his own house. He was still master, and his sovereignty no one had even questioned. As he desired to keep this so, he did not care to enter into any further discussion with Bettina. There were circumstances not beyond his conceiving which might cause him a greater loss of prestige than any already endured, and the thought of these made him careful to avoid coming again into close quarters with Bettina.

This position on his part led to an attitude toward his wife which might have been interpreted agreeably, since he no longer seemed to watch her so narrowly as he had done. He seemed, without speaking on the subject, to give her rather more freedom, and he never again referred to her interest in the Indian famine or in the doings of Horace Spotswood.

Yet Bettina had the same uncomfortable sense of being criticised and held to strict account. She felt as if evidence were rolling up against her which might one day be brought before her all at once.

She had, however, acquired a thirst for some knowledge of things beyond her own narrow interests, which was not to be calmed except by indulgence. When she looked about her in the

great throbbing life of London, she found so many objects which seemed absolutely to stand waiting for her interest and participation that she was soon caught in the strong movement of woman's work in social life in its wider and deeper meaning.

No sooner was it found that Lady Hurdly was willing to interest herself in such matters than they came crowding upon her. It was a new and delightful consciousness to her that she might become part of the power that was working against the evil in the world, and she threw herself into the effort with spirit and enthusiasm.

Life became better for her after that. The importance of her position was borne into her in a new and better way. By being Lady Hurdly she might hope, perhaps, to do some little service in bettering the lots of those who were at the other extreme of life's scale from her, whereas if she had remained in her former position she would have had as little value at one end as at the other.

Apart from these considerations of pure altruism was the sweet thought that she was drawing nearer to her mother in spirit, now that she was trying so hard to give help to others; and sometimes another thought would come. This was

that, far apart as their lives must be, she was trying to do in her sphere what Horace was doing in his, and perhaps with the same hope in the heart of each—namely, that the record of the future might help to compensate for the mistakes and wrong-doings of the past. She found herself passionately hoping that he had flung his evil past behind him, just as she was trying to throw hers.

Under these changed conditions, Bettina's second season in London was unlike the first in both its object and its results. From some unknown and unquestioned source she was becoming penetrated with the "scorn for miserable aims that end with self," and by the time that she was ready to return to Kingdon Hall her life had become so informed with its new purpose that she looked forward to the leisure which her removal there would give with real satisfaction in its opportunity for better work. Besides, she had now in view a personal supervision of the affairs on the Kingdon Hall estate, which she was eager to enter into. She had awakened to the duty of looking after the interests of tenants and the good of the parish.

Whether she would have the approval of her husband in such work or not she was unable to

guess. So far, beyond a rather cynical and distant observation of her new interests he had never interfered, but she guessed that the probable explanation of this fact was that he felt that her prominence in philanthropic activities, which had been approved by the best society, was a new way of reflecting glory upon himself.

For, as time had passed and Bettina had got a truer insight into the man she had married, the fact had confronted her that he was egoistic to the last degree. His cold neutrality of manner veiled this to most people, but to her keen and constant observation the length and breadth of his egoism were at times almost sickening.

She was therefore not unprepared for what happened when she began her visiting among the poor at Kingdon and her investigation into the needs of her husband's tenants. She had gone to work openly about it, and he had taken no notice; but one morning, when he was about to leave for a few days' hunting in one of the neighboring counties, he said to her, at the moment of departure:

"I want to tell you that I do not approve of the innovations which you are beginning to make in the management of affairs on the estate. The ladies of Kingdon Hall, heretofore, have left

these matters to their husbands, and I prefer that you do the same. I mention it now so that I may see no signs of interference on my return."

It was not at all unusual for him to take this tone with her, and he was following his usual custom in speaking to her in a moment of haste, whenever he had anything unpleasant to say. He could, in this way, end the conversation where he chose, and she saw that he had no intention of lingering now. The cart was at the door, and he had on his overcoat and even his hat, and stood drawing on and buttoning his gloves, with an unlighted cigar between his teeth. His eyes were bent upon his task, under frowning brows.

His cool and careless words, which her knowledge of him taught her were the veneering for an inexorable resolution, gave her a shock of disappointment. She did not often take a humble tone with him, but there was humility as well as entreaty in her voice as she now said,

"You won't forbid my going to see the tenants, and making things a little better for them, if I can, will you?"

"I forbid all interference," he answered, in a tone that made her feel that he relished the ex-

ercise of his power. "You can safely leave the affairs of my tenants to me. They have fared sufficiently well in my hands so far."

At one time these words and tones would have provoked a sharp retort, but Bettina had so far changed since the early months of her marriage that the thoughts of her own wrongs and indignities were now less insistent than the troubles of these poor people, which she had hoped to be able to alleviate.

"Oh, indeed you are mistaken!" she said, urgently. "You do not know how much they need what a very little money and effort would supply them with. Don't refuse to let me help them. It is a thing so near to my heart."

She saw his face grow harder.

"It is also," he said, "near my pocket. Going in for charity is all very well, if it amuses you, and I did not interfere with your doing so in London. Here, however, it is different. The time has come to stop it."

His words hurt her pride, and she felt, too, that he liked the position of being entreated by her. She had an instinct to retort sharply, but another instinct was stronger. She was feeling what was a new sensation to her—a willingness to humble her pride that others might be benefited.

"I have never given money without first satisfying myself that you approved it," she said, "and I will promise you to regulate my public charities in future strictly in accordance with whatever limitations you may set. But don't refuse to let me work a little here—it will not take much money—among the poor at our very doors."

Instead of softening him, as she had hoped that this attitude of humility would do, her words seemed to have the opposite effect. She had a feeling, all at once, that he enjoyed making her appeal to him, because it would give him the still greater pleasure of refusing.

He did not answer at once. It seemed to please him to keep her waiting. His gloves were now neatly fastened on his long thin hands, and with great deliberation he took out his match-box and proceeded to light his cigar. She noticed that he did not ask permission to do so, as he would certainly have done at one time—as he would also, undoubtedly, at one time have removed his hat while talking to her. Still, these signs of a diminished deference toward her touched her lightly compared with the importance which she attached to his answer to her question.

She watched him narrowing his eyes, to avoid the smoke which he was now puffing from his just-lighted cigar, and waited for him to speak.

Always scrupulously careful in small things, he walked to the window to throw away the end of the extinguished match. It suddenly came over her that he did not intend to answer her last words.

Perhaps he wanted to make her urge him further. At this her heart rebelled. She would not. Still, the idea of his going off for several days, leaving the question unsettled, was too annoying to contemplate. As he moved toward the door she said:

"You have not answered me."

"I beg your pardon," he said, with chill politeness. "I answered you in the beginning. I wish you to leave the management of the tenants' affairs where they properly belong—with me."

So saying, he lifted his hat, bowed, and went.

Bettina stood where he had left her, trembling with indignation from the sense of being treated tyrannically by a person who exercised an arbitrary power over her which she could not dispute. What had she ever done to deserve such treatment at his hands? How dared he treat her so?

With the new-born instinct of rectitude within her she tried to see if there was any reasonable ground for the real dislike of her which now seemed to be in her husband's mind. With every desire to be honest, she could think of none except the fact that she had not answered to his rein. He could hardly resent her not loving him, for he had married her without asking that; and besides, what did he know of love, as she was now beginning to comprehend it? No, it was not that which he resented in her; it was the fact that, although she chose to conform to him in outward things, he had never obtained the mastery of her in the manner which, to his ideas, befitted the relationship of Lord and Lady Hurdly. She thought of the picture of his meek little mother and masterful-looking father.

CHAPTER X

BETTINA had been left to the lonely idleness of her own reflections but a few days when the monotony of her life was broken by one of those sudden events which, by the vastness of their consequences, seem not only to change the face of nature for us, and the aspect of all the world without, but also to change ourselves, in our spirits and minds, so that we can never be the same creatures that we were before. She received a telegram announcing that Lord Hurdly had been killed in the hunting-field.

Poor Bettina, with all her faults and limitations, had something of her mother's noble nature in her, and this element of her somewhat complicated individuality had been the part of her which had expanded most of late. Her first feelings, therefore, were unmingled pity and regret. She did not think of herself and of how all things would be changed for her. Her whole thought was of him who so long had existed in

her mind as the image of pride and indomitable self-will, but who had now become, in one moment, the object of her deepest pity. She had scarcely ever thought of death in connection with him. He had seemed as sound as steel. She had never heard him speak of the least symptom of illness, and now the paper in her hand informed her that he was dead.

How thankful she was that she had not spoken to him angrily in their last talk! How she wished that she had said just one kind word to him at parting! True, he had given her no opportunity; but if she had known—

Suddenly she burst into violent weeping, and in this condition they found her, with the telegram on the floor at her feet.

"Who would have thought my lady would have taken it so hard?" said Mrs. Parlett, when the exciting news was heard down-stairs. "They was that 'aughty to one another before people! But it's them as feels the most, sometimes."

This remark was addressed to Nora, in the hope of eliciting a response, but Nora excelled in the art of holding her tongue.

It was she alone who was admitted to her mistress's apartments, where Bettina remained, in deep agitation, while the preparations for the ar-

rival of Lord Hurdly's body were being made. After her profound emotion of pity for him, her next thought had been of Horace. He was the heir and nearest of kin. It flashed upon her, with the suddenness of surprise, that he was Lord Hurdly now.

How strange, how absolutely bewildering, this new state of things seemed! Her mind seemed unable to grasp the strangeness of these new conditions.

Bettina saw no one but the rector of the parish. All that had to be done was so plain and simple, and there were so many capable hands to do it, that there was little need to consult with her. She begged the rector to act in her stead in giving all necessary directions. It was with a deep sense of relief that she reflected on the impossibility of Horace's arrival in time for the funeral. Perhaps she could get away somewhere before he came.

Those days when her husband's body lay in the apartment near her, and the relations and friends assembled to do it an honor which in his lifetime they were scarcely suffered to express, marked the period of the real awakening of Bettina's soul. The sense of freedom which her position now secured to her, the power to do and

be what she chose, was like wings to her spirit, and for the first time in her experience the woman and the hour were met.

When she had been free before to make her own life, her vision had been so limited, her aspiration so low, her interest in the heart-beats of the great humanity of which her little life was so small a part had been so uncomprehending, that she had cared only for the narrow issues which concerned herself. But now, in the hour which saw her free again, she was another woman, and this woman had a passionate purpose in her heart to make herself avail for the needs of others.

She resolved that the moment her affairs were settled her new life should begin. The period of her marriage had opened up before her vast opportunities, of which she was eager to take advantage. These would need money for their carrying out, but that she would have money enough she had never doubted. Of course until the reading of the will it would not be known what provision had been made for her, but Lord Hurdly had always been extremely generous as to money, and she had no misgivings on that score.

At last the funeral was over and the house was

rid of guests. Various cousins and friends had shown their willingness to remain and bear her company, but Bettina, with the rector's aid, had managed to get rid of these. She wanted to be alone and to think out some course of future action, for she was still in a state of absolute unadjustment to her new situation.

It had turned out that Lord Hurdly had left her an income of one thousand pounds. Her first realization of the smallness of this provision for her came from the rector's comment, which was spoken in a tone as if reluctantly censorious.

"I should not have believed Lord Hurdly capable of such a thing," he said. "I am sure that all who have cared for his honorable reputation must regret this as much on his account as on yours."

"Is it so little?" said Bettina, too proud to show disappointment. "A thousand pounds a year seems a sufficient sum for the support of one woman."

"For some women, perhaps," was the answer, "but not for the woman who has once held the position of mistress of Kingdon Hall. I repeat that I would not have believed it of Lord Hurdly."

Bettina did not hear his last emphatic words, or, at all events, took no conscious cognizance of them. She was absorbed in the contemplation of her new condition. How strange it seemed!

It was something more than strange. She had been too long in possession of the power and importance of being the reigning Lady Hurdly, so to speak, not to feel a real revolt at the idea of seeing herself laid on the shelf. It would not necessarily be so bad if she had had ample means, for she had made a place for herself in the world. But she was certain, from the air of commiseration with which not only the rector but others had regarded her, that she would be extremely curtailed in such opportunities as depended upon money; and she had sufficient insight into social affairs to know how the possession of money broadened opportunity, and the absence of it limited power.

There was no denying to herself the pain that it gave her to relinquish such a position. She had accommodated herself to greatness so naturally that it seemed incredible that she was to sink back into a life of obscurity. Frankly, she did not like it.

And yet, on the other hand, she felt an un-

feigned gladness that Horace was to come to his own. She rejoiced that no child of hers would ever stand in his way. She had reason to hope that he would use his great position to great ends, for the residuum of all her turbid and agitating thoughts about him was an admiration for the man in his attitude toward the world, no matter how much she still resented his attitude toward herself. That this last was so, there needed no stronger proof than her eager resolution to get away from Kingdon Hall—out of the country, if possible—before the arrival of the man whose place her husband had once taken, and who, in another sense, was now to take his.

CHAPTER XI

IT was some time before Bettina realized the changed conditions of her life consequent upon her husband's extremely small provision for her. In England, in the only society which she knew, it would be a mere pittance, after what she had always had there; but in America, in her old home, which she had always kept as her mother left it, it would be almost riches. Sometimes she thought of going back there for good, and leaving the great world in which she had found so little joy. But it was this world which could give her, as she now knew, the best substitute that can be offered for joy — active and interesting occupation. Having once known the inspiration of this, the stagnation of her old home was not to be thought of for a permanency. It seemed to her best, however, to go there for a short time to look after the money interests now become important to her, and from there to seek some work for the faculties

which she had only lately realized that she possessed.

In her heart she could but feel a certain wounded pride in the altered position to which her husband had deliberately condemned her. She felt that it was his way of punishing her for not having been a more conformable wife. He had not succeeded, in his life, in humbling her pride; he would therefore do it now. She felt that he must have had some intention of this sort.

That instinct was confirmed by the family lawyer, who told her, when he came to have a talk on business, that Lord Hurdly had expressed to him the supposition, and even the wish, that she should return to America to live.

Under other conditions her husband's wish would have greatly influenced her decision, but under these it had no weight whatever. She could not help feeling that she had been harshly treated. It was not the actual loss of money that she minded; it was the slight implied thereby. She had married Lord Hurdly without any pretence of loving him. He had not required that of her; and she had done her best to maintain her position as his wife in accordance with his wishes. These had often conflicted with her

own, but in such cases she had always yielded. She felt, therefore, that she had been treated with injustice.

The chief sting of this feeling was in connection with the thought of Horace. It made her flush with shame when she reflected that he was bound to know that the man for whom she had given him up had treated her so slightingly. Under the spur of this thought she had a wild impulse to run away to America, where he should never see or hear of her again. Business affairs compelled her to remain in England for a short while, but she was quite determined to leave it before Horace should arrive.

One morning, quite unexpectedly, she got a cable despatch from him. It was addressed to Lady Hurdly, at Kingdon Hall, and was in these words: "Kindly remain and act for me until I can arrive. Unavoidably detained here.—SPOTSWOOD."

This direct message from the young lover who had once been so near to her life moved Bettina to strange emotions. She was aware that Mr. Cortlin, the family lawyer, had written him that she was going away as soon as possible, and he had, of course, been informed of all the conditions of his cousin's will. Not one penny

had been left him except what was his by legal right; but Lord Hurdly's personal fortune had been an inconsiderable part of the estate, so that Horace was now a man of great wealth as well as the bearer of an old and noble title.

The signature to this telegram was one of the things that affected Bettina. The telegrams sent to the lawyers, the rector, and others had been signed "Hurdly." Several of these she had seen. It seemed to her, therefore, a very delicate instinct which had caused him to refrain from the use of her husband's name in addressing her. He had always been delicate in his intuitions and expressions, or at least so it had seemed.

The effect of this telegram upon Bettina was to make her more confused and uncertain in her plans than she had been before. She felt a strong instinct to avoid meeting Horace again, and yet this telegram was in the form of a request, and she could hardly refuse to do him a favor. In the midst of her perplexity a servant brought word that Mr. Cortlin had arrived and asked to see her.

When the lawyer entered, with his usual obsequious bow, Bettina received him with a rather cold civility. Her manner had become distinctly

more haughty since her descent in the scale of social and pecuniary importance.

Mr. Cortlin did not take the seat to which she invited him, but remained standing, with his hat in his hand, as he said:

"A former client of mine, and friend of his late lordship, Mr. Fitzwilliam Clarke, who died about a year ago, left in my keeping a letter to your ladyship, which he instructed me to deliver in person upon the death of Lord Hurdly. I am come now, my lady, in the fulfilment of that trust."

Bettina looked at him in amazement.

"There must be some mistake," she said. "I know no Mr. Fitzwilliam Clarke. I have never even heard his name."

"That may be, my lady, but there is no mistake. This letter was meant for you."

Bettina took the letter he held out, and opened it with a certain incredulous haste. Mr. Cortlin at the same moment walked away to a window, and stood there with his back turned while Bettina read the following sentences:

"My dear Lady Hurdly,—Should this letter ever come to your eyes, you will be at that time a widow, as I have left instructions that it

shall be delivered only in the event of your surviving your husband. By that time I shall have passed into the unknown world, where, if such things can be, I shall have had with Lord Hurdly an understanding which, by the hard conditions he imposed on me, was impossible in this life. But before leaving the world of human life and action I wish to make sure that at least one wrong which came about through me will have been repaired by me. I am aware that the rupture of your engagement of marriage to Mr. Horace Spotswood was caused chiefly by a letter shown you by Lord Hurdly, and purporting to come from an altogether trustworthy source—a man who was on the spot and who was a personal friend of his. I was that man. I was on the spot because I was sent there by Lord Hurdly for the purpose of writing this letter. For reasons which I need not enter into he had me in his power, and until one of us shall be dead he can force me to do his will. If you ever hold this letter in your hand and read these words we shall both be dead, and by this letter I desire to make reparation for a base and cruel wrong which I have helped to inflict upon an honorable and high-minded gentleman. I allude to the man who, when you read these words, will bear

the name and title of Lord Hurdly. The things I wrote of him are in absolute contradiction to the truth, for a nobler and more loyal heart never beat. You might well discredit any assurance which comes by means of me, and I do not ask to have my words accepted. All I expect to accomplish is that you shall pay enough attention to my statement to investigate the matter for yourself. He is well known, and once your ears are open you will hear enough to prove to you that he has been wronged. That I have wronged him, though reluctantly and by reason of a power I could not resist, is the saddest consciousness of my life.

"That I may possibly by this letter do something, however late, to repair this wrong is my chief consolation on leaving the world. I shall carry with me into whatever life I go an ineradicable resentment against the man who was Lord Hurdly, and I leave behind me the most ardent and admiring wishes of my heart for the man who, when you read this, will bear the noble name and title which his predecessor, if the truth about him could be known, has so soiled with treachery in the furtherance of the most indomitable egotism ever known in mortal man.

"In conclusion, I ask of your ladyship, as I

do of all the world, such gentle judgment as Christian hearts may find it in them to accord to one whose sins, though many, were of weakness rather than malice, and who did the evil work of a malicious man because he had not strength to brave what that man had it in his power and purpose to do to him in punishment of the resistance of his will.

"Your ladyship's repentant and unhappy servant,

"FITZWILLIAM CLARKE."

Bettina, in her breathless reading of this letter, had forgotten that she was not alone. As she finished it and thrust it back into its envelope she glanced toward the window, and there saw Mr. Cortlin's figure half hid by the heavy curtains.

"Mr. Cortlin," she said, in a tone which summoned him quickly to her side, "I wish to ask if you or any other person have any knowledge of the contents of this letter."

"I can only answer for myself, my lady. I have not. It was delivered to me sealed as you have found it, and no hint of its purpose told me."

"Had you a personal knowledge and acquaintance with this Mr. Clarke?" she asked next.

"I had, my lady. He was in the confidence

of his late lordship, who intrusted to him many of his private affairs."

"The man was under some great obligation to Lord Hurdly, was he not?"

"So I have understood, my lady. Formerly he was in the army, and I have heard that there was some dark story about him. I have even heard cheating at cards attributed to him, and it was said that Lord Hurdly's influence and friendship were all that saved him. The story was hushed up, but he resigned."

Bettina scarcely followed these last words. A sense of sickening confusion made her head spin round. The revelation of this letter was too much for her. The past possessed her like a blighting spell that she could never hope to shake off, and the knowledge which had come to her through this letter added a thousand-fold to its bitterness.

As to the future, she dared not try to see a step before her feet. To go through life with the consciousness of this wrong to Horace unexplained was a thought at which she shuddered. Yet to explain it under existing circumstances was impossible. The agitation of this interview had almost overwhelmed her. Mr. Cortlin saw it, and, ringing for her maid, silently withdrew.

When Nora came she found her mistress pale as death, and very nearly lost to consciousness.

After that interview, so significant for her in so many ways, Bettina began to long to get away —quite, quite away into another world—before the master of Kingdon Hall should have set foot in this one. She was doing her best to take his place and act for him in such matters as required immediate attention and decision. She could not refuse to do this, but she was anxious to be gone, to be quite to herself, so that she might the better look life in the face and see what could be done with the wretched remnant of her existence. She had given up all idea of making her residence in England, and there was no other country in which she had any deep interest, save for the mournful interest that attached to her mother's grave.

She had asked the lawyer to say to Lord Hurdly that she would, at his request, delay her departure for America a little while, but that she was extremely anxious to get off as soon as it would be possible. She also begged that he would cable when he was coming, as soon as he could make his plans to do so.

The days were active ones for Bettina in many new and serious ways. There were numerous busi-

ness matters which she had to be consulted about, and these gave her an insight into the affairs of the estate which showed her far more clearly than ever what need there was for reform, and revived in her her ardent longing to have a hand in these reforms. But from all such thoughts as these she turned away heart-sickened.

There were certain visits from Lord Hurdly's relations which had to be received, an ordeal that would have tried Bettina sorely had it not been that she made these the occasion for the investigation of Horace Spotswood's character, nature, actions, interests, habits, etc., which the fateful letter had recommended her to make. She had never had one instant's doubt of the truth of every word contained in that letter, but it was a sort of bitter pleasure to talk to these people and draw forth the manifestations of their delight at having Horace for the head of the family, and their confidence that this fact would result in pleasure and benefit to them all. From their ardent appreciation of him Bettina got at the fact of their universal dislike for the Lord Hurdly recently laid at rest with his ancestors.

Yet it was a relief when all the guests were gone and she was left alone to the mingled sweet and bitter feelings of her last days as mistress of

Kingdon Hall. The worldly spirit in Bettina, diminished as it was, had not wholly disappeared, and never would as long as she was young and healthy and so beautiful. These attributes carried with them a certain love of display, and although it was a trial to be borne with dignity, it was still a trial to her to think of losing forever the splendid place which she had for a short year or two held in the great world.

CHAPTER XII

BETTINA was writing in the library one morning when her attention was arrested by the sound of an approaching footstep. The next moment a servant announced,

"Lord Hurdly."

At this name she started violently. So long accustomed to associate it with one person, she forgot for the instant that another bore it now. As she rose, startled and expectant, through the portière held back by the servant there entered a man whose sharp dissimilarity to the image in her mind made her catch her breath.

The next second she knew that it was Horace, and realized that she was trembling from head to foot. The breadth of the room was between them, for he had paused just within the door, nodding to the servant to withdraw.

He stood there an instant in silence.

Perhaps she was no more startled by the surprise which the sight of him occasioned than

was he at the sight of her ; but the quality of the surprise was different. It was her beauty, her so far more than recollected beauty, which had arrested him and held him spellbound. He had left her sick with grief about her mother, the color faded from her cheeks, her eyes dulled with weeping. There had been, moreover, in her expression an apathy which his ardent words had failed to do away with. Besides these inherent things, the extrinsic points were glaringly a contrast to the present ones. Then her somewhat too slight figure had been dressed in gowns of village make and fit, and her lovely hair had been carelessly wound up, without regard to fashion or effect.

Now he saw confronting him a woman whom nature had endowed with a rare beauty, and for whom art had also done its best in the matter of outward adornment. True, she was clad in plain unrelieved black from head to foot, but no other costume could have so exquisitely displayed her glowing loveliness of coloring or the pure correctness of her outlines.

During the few seconds in which they stood looking at each other she had perceived also a great change in him. It was of a very different character, but it made all the more a strong ap-

peal to her, for he was mysteriously aged. Not only had the Eastern sun turned to bronze the once ruddy hues of his skin, but he had also lost flesh, and his hair was getting streaks of gray in it. His figure, too, was sparer, but it looked more powerful than ever; and still more apparent was the added look of strength in the familiar and yet subtly altered face.

There was no pause long enough to be embarrassing before he spoke.

"I hope you will excuse me," he said (and, oh, the voice was altered too, unless she had forgotten that rich, vibrating tone in it!), "for coming upon you so suddenly. I know I should have given warning, but I had what I think a sufficient reason for not doing so. I am hoping earnestly that you will agree with me when you have heard it."

"Pray sit down," said Bettina, speaking mechanically, and from the mere instinct of observance of ordinary forms. She had no sooner spoken than she remembered that it was his own house, of which she was doing the honors to him. If he remembered it also, he gave no sign, for he took the chair she indicated, with the conventional "Thank you" of an ordinary visitor.

Bettina also had sunk into her chair, and sat

quite still, with her white hands clasped together on the dense black of her dress. She could not speak, yet she dreaded lest, in the silence, he might hear the beating of her heart. Its soft thuds were plainly audible to her, and all the blood from her cheeks seemed to have gone there.

"In any event, I should have been obliged to come to England soon," said her companion, "but I should have put it off longer had I not felt it important to come on your account."

Bettina's eyes expressed a questioning surprise.

"On my account?" she said, vaguely.

"Certainly," was the prompt, decided answer. "The only responsibility which comes near to me in my new and strange position is that of protecting the honor and credit of the name I have assumed. These, you will excuse me for saying, have been seriously, I may even say shamefully, disregarded by the terms of the late Lord Hurdly's will."

Bettina's eyes had still that vague and puzzled look. She had not the least comprehension of what he meant. Could he be resenting the fact that, so far as it was practicable for him to do so, his cousin had disinherited him? But no, that was impossible. As she remained silent and expectant, he went on:

"Since he chose to disregard the duty and dignity of his position, it is for me, who must now bear his name, to repair that wrong so far as it is in my power to do so. It is for that explicit purpose that I am now come to speak to you."

Still Bettina looked perplexed.

"I don't understand exactly in what way the will has displeased you," she said. "There was a great deal of it that I hardly took in. But in any case there is nothing for me to do. As you know, my services have not been asked, and certainly there is no place for them. I have nothing whatever to do with the executing of Lord Hurdly's will. Indeed, my plans are all made to return to America immediately."

"I cannot be surprised at your decision," he said, with a certain resentment in his voice which she did not understand. "Certainly it would be natural for you to wish to shake off the dust of this land from your feet. But wherever you may choose to live for the future, it is my duty to see that you live as becomes the widow of Lord Hurdly, and it is for this purpose that I have hastened to get here before you should be gone."

All was now clear, and with the illumination which had come to her from these words of his

the color flooded her pale cheeks. Her first sensation was of keenly wounded pride.

"You might have spared yourself such haste," she said. "If you had taken the slight trouble to write to me, I could have saved you the long and hurried journey. So far from wishing to have more money than what I am legally entitled to, it is my purpose and decision to take nothing. I have of my own enough to live upon in the simple way in which I shall live for the future. Did you think so ill of me as to suppose that I would wish to grasp at more than my husband saw fit to leave me — or to take money at your hands?"

It was her instinct of pride which had caused her to use the words "my husband," which another instinct at the same moment urged her to repudiate. But pride was now the uppermost feeling of her heart, and it supplied her with a sudden and sufficient strength for this hour's need.

"This is in no sense a question between you and your late husband," said Horace. (Was there not in him also a certain hesitation at that word, and did not the same feeling as in her compel him to its use?) "Nor is it a question between you and me. The obviously simple issue

is what propriety demands as to the manner in which the widow of Lord Hurdly is provided for. It belongs to my own sense of the dignity of my position that the late Lord Hurdly's widow should be situated as becomes her name and title, and I am determined to see that this is done."

"Determined," she said, a certain defiance in her quiet tone, "is not the word for this case. You may determine as you choose, but what will it avail if I determine not to touch a penny belonging to either the late or the present Lord Hurdly? You are very careful of the dignity of your position. I must also look to mine, which you seem strangely to have forgotten."

His expression showed her plainly that these words of hers had cut deep into his consciousness. A swift compunction seized her heart, but her pride was still in the supremacy, and enabled her to stifle the feeling.

"I have not forgotten it," he said. "It is because I have been mindful of the dignity of your position that I have urged this thing upon you. The conditions of the will need not be generally known if you will accept the right and proper income, which I wish, above all things, to see you have. Can you not believe me sincere in my desire to remove the indignity put upon you by a

member of my family, and the bearer before me of a name and position of which it has now become my duty to maintain the credit? And can you not believe me just enough and kind enough to wish to see this done for your sake as well as for my own?"

Bettina's face continued proudly hard. If the gentleness of her companion's expression, the kindness of his manner, the delicate respect of his tones, made any appeal to her woman's heart, the all-potency of her pride enabled her to conceal it. But the struggle between the two feelings at war within her made a desperate demand upon her strength. She felt that she would do well to put an end to this interview as soon as practicable. With this purpose she said, abruptly:

"I am willing to do full justice to your motives, but they cannot affect my action. My mind is quite made up. I shall return to America at once, and there the credit of Lord Hurdly's name will not suffer any hurt, since I shall be practically out of the world. Certainly I shall be forever removed from the world in which his life will be spent. Do not think that I shall regret it. I shall not. My experience of your world has shown me that the mere possession of money, rank, position, influence, is powerless to bring

happiness. I thought once that if I should come to have these I could get pleasure and satisfaction from them, but I was wrong. My nature inherently loved importance and display, but I mistook the unessential for the essential. If I had had all these external things, together with the satisfaction of the inward needs, they might have made me happy. In themselves I have proved them to be worthless."

She was compelled to say these words. The intimate knowledge of the character of her husband which had come to her after marriage made her long that Horace should know that had she really comprehended the man as he perhaps had known him all the while, she never could have become his wife. It was impossible for her to tell him this, but she caught eagerly at her present opportunity of letting him know that she had had no duty toward her late husband beyond the mere formal obligation of her wifehood. She could not bear Horace to think that she had loved him. Even now, under the softening influence that death imparts, that thought was intolerable to her. This was quite aside from his treatment of her in his will, which, indeed, was strangely little to her. It was the memory of the crafty and common nature under that

polished exterior that made her recoil from the thought of him now.

If this feeling was strengthened by the contrast of the personality now present to her gaze, how could she be blamed ? Surely the man who stood before her might have seemed to answer any woman's heart's desire as lover, companion, friend. How her conscience smote her for the doubts she had once had of him ! When she remembered whose treachery it was that had created these doubts, there was hate in her heart.

She did not wish him to see the expression of this feeling in her face, so she rose abruptly and turned from him. As if he understood her, he rose also, and crossed the room to the desk at which she had been seated on his entrance.

Here were heaped papers and memoranda connected with the Kingdon Hall estates. Evidently he recognized their character, for he said:

"At least you have not refused to give me the help that I asked. I've been talking to Kirke, and he tells me you have been taking an interest in the affairs of the tenants. Thank you for this."

In an instant the bitterness in Bettina's heart was changed into a new and softer emotion. She saw the opportunity of effecting now what she

had been so powerless to effect in the past. Forgetting everything else, she came quickly to his side and took up one of the papers. This was in her own handwriting, and was a memorandum of some length. She held it away from him a moment, her face flushing, and a look of hesitation showing on it.

"I never intended that you should see this," she said. "I began it long ago, and had to put it by; but recently I have taken it up again, without really knowing why, except that all my whole heart was in it."

"What is it?" he asked. "I beg you to let me see it."

"No," she said. "It is not my affair, and I must remember that. It concerns some most deplorable facts which I have discovered concerning the management of the Kingdon Hall estates, but—"

"Then it is my affair," he interrupted her; "and since you know what these abuses are, and have looked into them, you surely will not deprive me of the help that you could give. I ask it as a favor."

Still Bettina hesitated, but he could see that she was longing to comply. He could imagine, also, what it was that held her back.

"Not as a favor to me," he hastened to add; "I appeal to you in the name of these poor tenants, who have been so long neglected and abused. This is no new thing to me. I have seen it going on from the time I was a boy here, and I can truly say that almost the only pleasure that I have looked forward to in succeeding to the estates has been the righting of these wrongs. Surely you will not refuse to help me to do this."

For answer, Bettina turned upon him a pair of ardent eyes that swam with tears.

"Oh, are you really going to do this blessed, glorious thing?" she said. She had forgotten herself for the moment, and was thinking only of them—the wretched beings whose wrongs had so long oppressed her, and who, it seemed, were to have justice and care and kindness at last. "You don't know how hideous the condition of these poor creatures is, and how impossible it has been for me to do anything in the past. To think there is some one who will let me tell about it at last and give the help that is so needed! But you can do nothing with such a steward as Kirke. His heart is as cold as ice."

"Kirke shall go at once. I have long believed that he was unworthy of the position he holds.

If you will give me the benefit of your investigation and insight into the situation you will save me much trouble, and you can also feel that these poor people will be that much nearer to having their distress relieved."

At these prompt, determined words her heart swelled, and again tears brimmed her eyes.

"Oh, thank God that you will help them!" she said. "Now that I am sure of that, I can go away contented. It would have broken my heart to leave them so—yet I had not dared to hope that I could do anything. You have no idea of the extent of it. It will take a great deal of money to give them new houses, proper sanitary conditions, and all the things they need."

"Never mind that—only tell me what to do."

"But *can* you do it? I know how comparatively limited you are as to money."

"Comparatively only," he said, reassuringly. "I have much less than my predecessor had, but fortunately I have little pride and simple tastes. I can let the place in Leicestershire, where the hunting is good, and I can also lease the town house if necessary. Pray consider that the question of money is disposed of. I assure you that does not enter into it."

Thus invited, Bettina sat down before the desk,

while he took a seat near by, and with the papers before her she went fully into the questions at issue, showing a grasp of the situation which soon testified to her companion that she had studied it to some purpose. All the changes which she recommended were approved, but more than once his attention was diverted from the purpose of the future to an indignant contempt for the delinquencies of the past. It was hard for him to constrain himself to silence as to this, but Bettina thanked him in her heart for the successful effort which he made. She was too abject in her sense of compunction for her own past to feel inclined to severe judgment of another, and in her joy that these cherished plans of hers were to be immediately realized she was able to put by for the moment more personal trouble. She spoke with a fervor that made her beautiful face wellnigh adorable in its kind compassion, and when she would describe the wrongs and hardships of these poor simple folk her eyes at times would fill with tears of pity and her voice would tremble.

She knew it not, but in this hour she was making a new revelation of herself to Horace, which answered to the need of his maturer nature as marvellously as the Bettina of old had satisfied the needs of the ardent young fellow that he was

then. If he remembered that Bettina only as being beautiful and beloved, he saw in this one a far nobler and more perfect beauty, as he recognized in her qualities more worthy to command love.

Here they were alone together, in a mood of extraordinary openness and sincerity, for they were thinking the same thoughts of helpfulness to others, and there was not an atom of the embarrassment of their personal relationship to come between them now. It was not singular, therefore, that he, for his part, should have longed to speak to her, heart to heart, of that mysterious thing which had divided them, and to tell her that, in spite of all — in spite of facts that had been flaunted before his eyes in society, in the public prints, and everywhere — he had never quite succeeded in stilling a small voice in his soul which had continued to declare that the young girl to whom he had so passionately given his love was less fickle and unfaithful than these facts had shown her to be. Now, more than ever, this insistent voice repeated itself. How he longed to ask her the simple question! But then came common-sense, and demanded, What question? Was there any question which he could ask her to which the fact and conditions

of her marriage to Lord Hurdly were not a final answer?

As for Bettina, she had also her longings to take advantage of that interview, when they were speaking together in such friendly converse, by telling him of the letter of confession which she had received, but pride here took the place of common-sense, and bade her to be silent.

They had gone over all the papers together now. There was no longer any excuse for lingering. He had given and repeated his assurances that all these abuses which she so lamented should be remedied, and she had thanked him again and again. Both felt that the time to part had come. And yet both felt an impulse to postpone it. It was her consciousness of this feeling which now made Bettina act. There was an influence from his very presence which alarmed her.

"I must go now," she said, her voice a shade unsteady.

"No, it is I who am going," was the answer. "I return at once to London, as I have neither the right nor the desire to intrude upon your privacy. I wish to say, however, that I do not accept your decision as to your future income. I beg you to give my wish, my earnest request,

your consideration. I shall write to you. Perhaps I can put the case more clearly so. At all events, I shall try."

Bettina shook her head.

"You will simply waste your time," she said. "Nothing can change me from my purpose of going at once to America, with no income but my own little inheritance, and taking up my old life there."

The word inheritance had suggested to both of them the thought of her mother. They saw the consciousness in each other's eyes.

"How can you take up your old life there," he said, "when the presence which made its interest, its very atmosphere, is gone? It is enough to kill you—and you will not have money to live elsewhere."

The keen solicitude in voice and eyes could not be mistaken. It was evident that he cared for what she might suffer—what might ultimately become of her. The thought was rapture to her starved and lonely heart.

"I must bear it," she said, trying to control her voice as well as her face. "Life will be no harder to me there than elsewhere."

"You are wrong. In no other spot on earth will the loss of your mother so oppress you. I

know what that has been to you, by my consciousness of what that possession was. And remember one thing, which gives me some right to speak to you as I am doing now—I loved your mother and she also loved me."

At these words and the tones that accompanied them Bettina's strength gave way. She dropped back in the seat from which she had risen, and, hiding her face in her hands, burst into tears.

She could not see the effect of her weeping on the man, who still stood motionless and erect before her. She did not know that the tears sprang into his eyes also, and that the whispered utterance of her name was on his lips.

He heard it, however, though she did not, and the knowledge that he had lost control of himself made him turn away and walk to the other end of the room.

When he had stood there a few seconds, with his back turned, he heard her voice, somewhat shaken, though with the accent of recovered self-possession, saying, in a tone of summons,

"Lord Hurdly—"

An inward revolt sprung up at being so addressed by her. The name had only sinister associations for him in any case, but to hear it

from Bettina's lips filled him with a sort of rage.

"Lord Hurdly," she said again, and this time her voice had gained in steadiness, until it sounded mechanical and hard.

"I wish to express to you," she said, when he had drawn a little nearer, "my thanks for your kind intentions concerning me. I can only repeat, however, that my decision is quite fixed, and that I shall carry out the plans I have made known to you. Do not urge me further. Do not write to me. It will be useless. Let me go back to the life from which you never should have taken me. You were mistaken in me from the first, and I have been nothing but a trouble and a hinderance to you. I am sorry. I ask you to forget it all if you can. But, above all things, I ask, if you would really help me and serve me in the one way in which I can be helped by you, that you will consider that the present moment closes our intercourse in every way, and will show me the respect, little as I deserve it, of proving to me that in this one instance, at least, you believe me capable of acting with rectitude and dignity, and of meaning what I say."

He did not answer her. He only stood profoundly still and looked at her. That gaze, the

searching, scrutinizing power of it, made her afraid. Trembling with terror of what she might reveal in answer to it, she turned suddenly and vanished through a door behind her, leaving him standing there, and with a consciousness that his keen eyes were on her yet, reading what she so ardently desired to conceal.

Once in her own room, she locked the door, and then ran swiftly to the window, which gave her a view of the terrace below.

There she saw waiting a hired trap, with its driver drowsing in the sunlight. As she looked, she saw the man from whom she had just parted come rather slowly down the steps and get into the shabby conveyance. His hat-brim hid the upper part of his face, but she saw the stern set of his jaw, the bronzed pallor of his cheeks.

She watched the little trap until it had disappeared behind some great oaks, which were one of the glories of Kingdon Hall. In a strange way she had come to love this stately old place, and it gave her a pang to feel that she was about to look her last on it. This feeling, however, was subordinated to another, which literally tore her heart; this was that, by the use of every means of thought and action within her power, she had

quite determined never to run the risk of seeing this man again.

She knew that her only safety lay in flight, and she set to work at once to make her preparations to fly.

CHAPTER XIII

IN the days that followed, Bettina's only resource was in bodily activity. She wrote at once and took her passage on a steamer to sail for America one week from the day of Horace's visit. Then, with Nora's help, she set to work to do her packing. The French maid was sent away, and her lady refused all other offers of service.

Her first impulse had been to leave all her wardrobe and personal belongings behind her, and this she would undoubtedly have done but for the counteracting instinct to remove from any possibility of the sight of the future occupant of these apartments any smallest reminder of the late Lady Hurdly. No doubt another bearer of that name would soon be installed in them, and to her the least reminder of the beautiful Bettina who had once so strangely come to it would naturally be offensive.

With this thought in her mind, she eagerly

helped Nora to collect and pack away every trace of her ever having lived here. One record of the fact it was out of her power to remove, and this was the full-length portrait of her, in all the state and magnificence of her proud position, which hung in the picture-gallery, and which Horace had never seen. Neither had he ever seen her in such a guise, and, in spite of her, there was a certain exultation in her breast when she imagined the moment of his first beholding it. Another moment, equally charged with mingled pride and pain, was the anticipation of the time when the next bearer of the name and title should come to have her portrait hung there. No Lady Hurdly who had come before could bear the comparison with her, and she knew it. Was it not, therefore, reasonable to believe that those who followed her might suffer as much by the contrast?

But these feelings of satisfaction in the consciousness of her appropriateness to such a setting as Kingdon Hall were only momentary, and many of those busy hours of work were interspersed with lonely fits of weeping, when even Nora was excluded from her mistress's room. The good creature, who had never been burdened with mentality, went steadily on with her work

and asked no questions ; yet it was not unknown to her that Bettina's unhappiness depended not altogether upon the fact of her recent widowhood, or even upon the disastrous consequences of it in her future life.

Two or three times Nora had brought to her mistress letters in a handwriting which she had not forgotten, and although she made no sign of suspicion, she did connect these letters with Bettina's unhappiness.

Certainly it was no wonder that such letters as she received from Horace now should have so desperately sad an influence on her. In them he begged, argued, pleaded with her to grant him this one request, even using her mother's name to touch and change her. Indeed, there was a tone in these letters that she could scarcely understand. Keenly conscious as she was of the injustice of which she had been guilty toward him, it seemed incredible that he could so ignore it as to manifest any personal interest in her on her own account. She even felt a certain regret that he could so lose sight of this flagrant fact. It had come to be a vital need to her to have the ideal of Horace in her life. It was now almost more essential to her to have something to admire than something to love. Under these conditions

she felt a certain sense of disappointment in him, that he could seem to forget the deep wrong she had done him. And yet, in utter contradiction to this feeling, his kind ignoring of it soothed her tortured heart.

She sent no answer to these letters. She even hoped that by taking this course she might make the impression on him that she did not read them. This was her design and her consolation, even while she read and re-read them with a devouring eagerness. She never paused to ask herself why this was. She avoided any investigation into her feeling for Horace. It was enough that, in spite of all the self-accusation and self-abasement which she carried in her heart, this being who knew the very worst of her could still think her worthy of kindness and respect. When she thought of this she felt as if she could go on her knees to him.

One fear was constantly before her mind, and that was that he might seek a personal interview with her again. She dared not trust herself to this, instinctively as she longed for it. It was, therefore, with positive terror in her breast that she heard one morning from Nora that Lord Hurdly was in the house, having come down by train from London.

"I cannot see him—I will not!" she cried, in an impassioned protest, which only Nora could have seen her portray.

"He did not ask to see you," said Nora. "I met him in the hall, and he told me to say to you that he required some papers which were in the library, and that he would, with your permission, like the use of the room for a few hours. He told me to say that he had had luncheon, and would not disturb you in any way."

At these words Bettina felt a sinking of the heart, which was her first consciousness of the sudden hope she had been entertaining. This made her reproach herself angrily for such weakness and want of pride, and with this feeling in her heart, she said, abruptly,

"There is no answer to Lord Hurdly's message."

"I beg your pardon," said Nora, hesitatingly, "but I am quite sure he is expecting an answer."

"I say there is no answer," Bettina repeated, with a sudden sternness. "Lord Hurdly is in his own house. He can come and go as he chooses. His asking permission of me is a mere farce."

Nora ventured to say no more, and withdrew in silence, leaving her mistress alone with the consciousness that Horace was in the very house

with her, and that at any moment she might, if she chose, go to him and tell him all the truth.

And why did she not? That old feeling between them was quite dead. She had a right to clear herself from a condemnation which she did not deserve—a right, at least, to make known the palliating circumstances in the case. In any other conceivable instance she would not have hesitated to do so. What was it, then, which made it so impossible in this instance?

The answer to this question leaped up in her heart, and so struggled for recognition that she had an instinct to run away from herself that she might not have to face it. She wanted to close her eyes, so that she might shut out the truth that was before her mental vision, and to put her hands over her ears, that she might not hear the voice that clamored to her heart.

Surely a part of this feeling was the compunction which she felt for having wronged him. That she might openly acknowledge. But that was not all. She was aware of something more in her own heart. Even that she might have stifled, and, supported by her pride, might have concisely told him of the error under which she had acted. But there was still another thing that entered in. This was a faint, delicious,

disturbing, unacknowledged to her own heart, suspicion about Horace himself. He had said nothing to warrant her in the belief that his anxiety about her future was anything more than the satisfaction of his own self-respect, but her heart had said things which she trembled to hear, and there was a certain evidence of her eyes. In leaving her the other day—or rather at the moment of her hurried leaving of him—he had looked at her strangely.

That look had lingered in her consciousness, and without effort she could recall it now. In doing so her cheeks flushed, her heart beat quicker. She felt tempted to woo the sweet sensation, and by every effort of imagination to quicken it into keener life, but the seductiveness of this temptation terrified her.

She started from her seat and looked about her. How long had she sat there musing—dreaming dreams which every instinct of womanly pride compelled her to renounce? She wondered if he had gone. Once more came that mingled hope and fear that he might seek an interview with her before leaving. The hope was stronger than ever, and for that reason the fear was stronger too.

A footstep in the hall arrested her attention,

and she stood palpitating, with her hand upon her heart. It passed, leaving only silence; but it had been a useful warning to her. Suppose, in her present mood, Horace should make his way to her sitting-room and knock for admittance. Would she—could she—send him away, with her heart crying out for the relief of speech and confession to him as it was doing now?

With a hurried impulse she caught up a light wrap of dense black material, and passed rapidly into the hall. Her impulse was to go out of doors, to get away from the house until he should have left it; but in order to do this from her apartments, she must pass by the library, and this she feared to do. So she changed her purpose, and stepping softly that no one might hear her, she entered the long picture-gallery, and closed the door behind her with great care to make no noise. Many of the blinds were closed, but down at the far end where her picture hung there was some light, and with an impulsive desire to look at this picture, with a view to the impression that it might make on Horace when he should see it, she glided noiselessly down the room toward it.

The full-length portraits to right and left of her loomed vaguely through the half-light. She

glanced at each one as she passed slowly along, with the feeling that she was taking leave of them forever. In this way her gaze had been diverted from the direction of her own portrait, and she was within a few yards of it when, looking straight ahead of her, she saw between the picture and herself the figure of a man.

He stood as still as any canvas on the wall, and gazed upward to the face before him. Bettina, as startled as if she had seen a ghost in this dim-lighted room, stood equally still behind him, her hand over her parted lips, as if to stifle back the cry that rose.

And still he stood and gazed and gazed, while she, as if petrified, stood there behind him, for moments that seemed to her endless.

Presently she saw his shoulders raised by the inhalation of a deep-drawn breath, which escaped him in an audible sigh. The sound recalled her. Turning with a wild instinct of escape, she fled down the long room, her black cape streaming behind her, and vanished in the shadows out of which she had emerged.

Somehow, she never knew how, she let herself out into the hall, and thence she sped through the long corridor, down the stairs, past the open door of the vacant library, and out into the

grounds. She met no one, and when at last she paused in the dense shadows of some thick shrubbery, she had the satisfaction of feeling that she had been unobserved. Here, too, she was quite secluded, and in the effort to collect herself she sat down on the grass, her knees drawn up, her forehead resting on them, her clasped hands strained about them.

How long she remained so, while her leaping heart grew gradually calmer, she did not know.

A sound aroused her from her lethargy. It was the clear whistle of some one calling a dog. She knew who it was before a voice said,

"Here, Comrade—come to me, sir."

The voice was not far off, but the shrubbery was between it and her. She would have felt safe but for the dog. She did not move a muscle.

The footsteps were drawing near her, and now bounding leaps of a dog could be heard also. Both passed, and she began to breathe more freely, when what she had dreaded came. The dog, stopping his gambols, began to sniff about him. The next moment he had bounded through the shrubbery and was yelping gleefully at her side.

Instantly she sprang to her feet and stood there, slight and tall and straight in her long black

wrap, the image of pallid woe. All the blood had left her face, and her eyes were wide and terrified.

It was so that she appeared to the man who, parting the branches of the thick foliage, stood silent and surprised before her. She might have been the very spirit of widowhood, so desolate she looked.

Raising his hat automatically, he said, in a strained, unnatural voice, "Can I do anything for you?"

She tried to speak, but speech eluded her.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but can I do anything for you, Lady Hurdly?"

Oh, that name! She had had an instinct to free herself at last from the burden she had borne, and to tell him, in answer to his question, that he could do this for her—he could hear her tell of the wretched treachery by which she had been led to do him such a wrong, and of the misery of its consequences in her life. But the utterance of that name recalled her to herself. It reminded her not only who she was, but also who and by what means he was also.

"Leave me," she said, throwing out her hand with a repellent gesture. "I have gone through much, and I am not strong. If you have any

"THE VERY SPIRIT OF WIDOWHOOD"

mercy, any kindness, leave me to myself. It is not proper, perhaps, that I should ask any favor of you, but I do. I beg you not to speak or write to me again until I have done what must be done here, and gone away from this place and this country forever."

There was an instant's silence, during which Comrade nestled close to her and tried to lick her hand, all the time looking longingly at Horace. Then a voice, constrained and low, said, sadly: "I will grant your favor, Lady Hurdly. What of the favor I have asked of you?"

"I cannot. It is impossible," she cried. "Surely I have been humiliated enough without that. It is the one thing you have in your power to do for me, never to mention that subject again."

"I shall obey you," he said; "but in return I ask that you will not forget my request of you, though you have forced me to silence. While a wrong so gross as that goes unrepaired I can never rest. Remember this, and that you have it in your power to relieve me of this burden. Now I will go."

He turned and vanished through the shrubbery, Comrade after him.

Bettina sank upon the ground, covering her face with the long drapery of her cape. Sud-

denly she felt a touch. Her heart leaped, and she uncovered her head, showing the light of a great hope in her eyes.

But it was only Comrade, nestling close to her, with human-eyed compassion. She threw her arms around him, and pressed her face against his shaggy side.

"Did he send you to me, Comrade," she whispered, "because he knew that I was miserable and alone?"

The gentle creature whined and wagged his tail as if in desperate effort to reply.

"I know he did! I know he did!" she cried. "Oh, how kind and good and unrevengeful he is! And I can never tell him the truth. I can never tell that to any human being, Comrade, but I'll tell it to you." She drew his head close to her lips and whispered a few words in his ear.

Then she sprang to her feet, a great light in her eyes, as she threw her arms upward with an exultant movement, and cried, as if to some unseen witness up above, "I have said it!"

CHAPTER XIV

AFTER this Bettina went about her preparations for departure with a spirit of calm and collectedness which came from the knowledge of herself, which she had at last fully accepted. Hundreds of times in these last few days her mother's words had come back to her: "The day will come when you will know what you are incapable even of imagining now—what is the one perfect love and complete union that can ever be between two human beings. . . . Test the world, if you will—and your nature demands that you shall test it—but you will live to say one day: 'My mother knew. My mother's words have come true.'"

It was even so. She knew now, at last, and the knowledge had come to her when inexorable necessity compelled her to separate herself forever from the man who, not suddenly, but by a system of gradual evolution — from the crude emotions of her girlhood through the growing

consciousness of later years—had now manifested himself to her as all her heart could desire, all her spirit could crave, all her mature womanhood could need. She realized that he had long been this to her, but with a thick veil between herself and him which had hid the truth from her. The reading of the letter given her by Mr. Cortlin had torn that veil apart, and she saw him as he was, the man of her ideal. She did not, at the same moment, see her own heart as it was. This vision had come to her with her renewed intercourse with Horace, who had appeared before her now the ripe product of the noble possibilities which she had vaguely perceived in him once, when she had cared too little to think deeply of him in any way.

Oh, to have kept the place she had once had at his dear side! To have shared with him the privations of a life that would have been narrow and obscure indeed compared with the one which she had known in its stead, but, oh, how rich in the way she had now come to count riches!

Thoughts like these she had to fight against. Perhaps in the end they would conquer, and would hunt her to the death; but now, until she could get out of the country, she must put them down.

She had only a few days left, and she determined to devote a part of these to some farewell visits among the tenants. As far as she had been able to do, she had made friends with these poor folk, and had given what she could to relieve their necessities; but, in comparison with what was needed, the money at her command had seemed pitifully small.

When Lady Hurdly, dressed in her deep widow's mourning, descended the steps of her stately residence and entered the waiting carriage, whose black-liveried servants saluted her respectfully, she had a consciousness that servants and tenants alike must feel a certain commiseration for the great lady, such as they had known her, now sunk to poverty as well as obscurity. This feeling made her manner a little colder and prouder then usual as she sat alone in the sunshine of a lovely autumn morning and was driven between the beautiful English hedgerows and through the fertile fields which she had learned to love. How soon would all be changed for her! And changed to what? The isolated exile of a place filled with the haunting memories of the past—her mother, whom she had lost forever, and her young lover, who was as absolutely lost to her.

Strangely to herself, it was the latter that she felt to be the keener pain. To the former she was reconciled; as we do, sooner or later, reconcile ourselves to the inevitable; but the supreme sting of this other grief was that she felt it need not have been. Sitting there in her carriage, the object of much eager attention, she felt so desolate and wretched that it was with difficulty that she kept back her tears.

She dreaded the ordeal before her. She felt that she must take leave of these people and say a word of kindness to them, since she was so miserably unable to do more; but these visits were always depressing. Since the tenants had discovered that they had a sympathetic listener in her, they had luxuriated in the pouring out of their sorrows. Of course they had not ventured to accuse her husband of being connected with them, but the lesson was one that he who ran might read.

So, when the carriage stopped at the door of the first cottage, she had made up her mind that she could not stand much in the way of these miserable confidences to-day, and would make her visits short.

But when she entered the house she was conscious of a total change of atmosphere. Every

creature in the room gave proof of this, according to his or her kind. The old woman who sat knitting by the hearth looked up at her with a dim twinkle in the eyes that had heretofore expressed nothing but a consciousness that things were bad and getting worse; and the children, who, indeed, had taken little count of the depression of their elders, now manifestly shared their relief from it. It was their mother who, with a strange smile of hope on her careworn face and a fervent clasping together of her work-worn hands, made the explanation to the visitor.

But this explanation, when it had been heard, was almost more of an ordeal to Bettina than the one which she had feared. Certainly it made a stronger demand upon her power of self-control. For the key-note of it all was Horace. He had been here before her, and had done, or promised to have done, all that she had so passionately wished to do. His name was on their lips continually; even the little children lisped it. It was "his lordship this" and "his lordship that," in a way that furnished a strange contrast to the studied avoidance of the word under former conditions.

Somehow, glad as she was, it was hard for Bettina to bear. In the midst of the accounts

of what his lordship had done and said, and how he was to right all their wrongs and make everybody happy, she got up and took a hurried leave.

What was the use of her staying here? What was a little sympathetic feeling, more or less, to these wretchedly poor creatures? It was their material needs that they wished satisfied, and a stronger hand than hers was at work on these. And if—as seemed so plain, as she could so well imagine from her own knowledge of him—he was able and willing to give them the sympathy and interest as well as the practical help they needed, where was any use for her? There was none—nobody needed her, she told herself, desperately, and the sooner she lost herself in the oblivion of America the better.

Each cottage that she visited showed the same metamorphosis in its inmates. A lame boy to whom she had once given a pair of crutches had a new wheel-chair, and the crutches were thrown in a corner. A sick child for whom she had bought some prepared food, which it had not been able to take, had been sent off to a hospital for regular treatment, and its poor mother was enjoying the first rest of many years, with a consciousness that the child was better off than it

could possibly be with her. An old man who had been long bedridden, and to whom she had sent some clean bedclothes, had been moved into another room with complete new furnishings, while the occupant of this room had been sent elsewhere, so that the distressing sense of over-crowdedness for sick and well was entirely gone from the house.

In almost every cottage that she visited she saw the same evidences. How pitiful her own efforts seemed beside these! What was heart compared with hand? What was sympathy compared with money? And was she so sure that she gave even the sympathy? She felt in her breast now no sense of pity for their suffering, no consciousness even of rejoicing in their relief. The only feeling there—and it seemed to fill her whole heart—was pity for her own numb, gnawing wretchedness, for which there could be no relief.

When the last hurried visit was ended, she drove home, completely unnerved. Her black veil was lowered before her face, and though she sat erect and composed to outward seeming, the tears rained down her cheeks.

Her remaining days at Kingdon Hall were spent in a state of such listlessness and inertia that Nora began to fear that she was going to be ill.

She urged her mistress to send for the doctor; but, for answer, Bettina burst into tears, declaring that she was not ill, and begging Nora to do everything for her that was necessary to get her off on the steamer on which she had taken passage, as she felt unable to do anything herself.

How the intervening hours passed she never knew; but, as if taking part in a dream, she went through them all, and at last found herself settled in her state-room, with Nora to take care of her, and no one to spy on her or notice what she did. Asking Nora, as piteously as a child, to help her to undress, she went to bed, and from that bed she did not rise until the ship had touched another shore, and the breadth of the world lay between herself and Horace.

How glad she would have been to lie there and sail on forever, freed from her responsibility to the future, as she was from that to the past!

CHAPTER XV

IT was when Bettina was a matter of three hours out at sea that Lord Hurdly arrived at Kingdon Hall, and, on being admitted, ordered the servant to say to Lady Hurdly that he wished to see her. His surprise was great when the man informed him that Lady Hurdly had that day sailed for America.

Dismissing the servant, he went to the library and shut himself up there alone. How strangely was this house altered to him in one moment's time! Just now he had felt a presence in it which had made every atom of it significant. Now, how dead, empty, meaningless, it had suddenly become!

The effect of this change was almost startling to him, and for the first time he had the courage to face himself and to demand of his own soul an explanation.

He was a man of a peculiarly uncomplex nature. When, on meeting Bettina, he for the

first time fell deeply in love, he had looked upon the matter as a finality, and he had never ceased so to regard it. When she deserted him, without giving him a chance to speak, he had, in the overwhelming bitterness of his heart, forsworn all women. It had never occurred to him to put another in Bettina's place. For a long time a passionate resentment possessed him. When he knew that Bettina had married his cousin, this resentment had had two objects to feed upon instead of one; but at first the bitterness of his anger against the being in whom he had supremely believed greatly outweighed that against the being in whom he had never believed. Lord Hurdly had never had it in his power to wound and anger him as Bettina could. So, when he got transferred from St. Petersburg to Simla, it was with the instinct of removing himself as far as possible from Bettina. Of the other he scarcely thought.

When, however, the first consternation of the sudden blow was over, and he grew calm enough to be capable of anything like temperate thought, he tried to imagine how this strange state of things had come about.

Obviously Bettina must have sought Lord Hurdly out, and it was almost certain that she

had done this with a view to mediating between him and his offending heir. He recalled her having said, more than once, that she intended to win him over, and he pictured to himself what had probably transpired in the fulfilment of her plan. Lord Hurdly, who was notoriously indifferent to women, saw in Bettina a new type, and, as consequent events proved, became possessed of the wish to have her for his wife. This being so, he had probably not scrupled as to the means to this end. Gradually, from having held Bettina chiefly guilty, Horace began to feel that it was quite possible that she had been less so than the artful and determined man, who had undoubtedly brought to bear on her all the wiles of which he was master.

What the wiles were, how unscrupulously they were employed to effect any end that he had in view, Horace was now more than ever aware.

And every fresh revelation of them tended to soften him toward Bettina. He was in the habit of trusting his instincts, and these had as determinedly declared to him that his cousin was false. On his return to England, after Lord Hurdly's death, both of these instincts had found ample confirmation. The more he looked into the affairs of his predecessor, in his relations to his ten-

ants, his family, his lawyers, and the world at large, the more did his mistrust and condemnation of him deepen, while, as for Bettina, it took little more than the impression of his first interview with her to restore almost wholly his old belief in her truth and nobleness.

On the basis of her having been deceived by Lord Hurdly about him, he could forgive her her marriage. Where would her desolate heart have turned for comfort? And he knew her nature well enough to realize that what Lord Hurdly had to offer might have seemed likely to serve her as a substitute for happiness. He knew, moreover, that Bettina had never loved him in the sense in which he had loved her, and this fact made his judgment gentler.

As he stood there alone, in the great house, strangely empty now that her rich presence was removed from it, he wished with all his heart that he had gone to her, and forcing her to look at him with those candid eyes of hers, had said: "Bettina, tell me the truth. Why did you do it?" Oh, if he only had!

Then reflection forced upon him the possible answer that he might have received. She might have coldly resented the impertinence of such a speech, or she might have given him to under-

stand that what appeared true was really true—namely, that his cousin's splendid offer was preferred to his poor one. Yes, he was no doubt a fool to hold on to his belief in Bettina in face of the obvious facts. The thing he had to do was to overcome it, and go on with his life and career quite apart from her.

This would have been the easier to do but for one thing. He had satisfied himself that Bettina had been unhappy in her marriage to Lord Hurdly. It was evident that the worldly importance which it had given her had not sufficed her needs. He knew—her own mother had avowed it to him—that Bettina was ambitious; but he knew, what the same source had also revealed, that she had a good and loving heart. What he felt was that she had been taught by bitter experience the emptiness of mere worldly gratification, and that poor heart of hers was breaking in its loneliness.

But then came reason again, and pointed to the hard facts before his eyes. What a fool he was to go on constructing a romantic theory out of his own consciousness when Bettina, by definite choice and decision, had proved herself to be, what he must compel himself to consider her, both heartless and false!

Fortified by the bitter support of this concep-

tion of her, he left the library, and, for the first time since his return, made the complete tour of the house. Through most of the apartments he passed swiftly enough, but in two of them he paused. The first was the long picture-gallery, where he looked critically at his own boyish portrait, wondering if Bettina had ever looked at it, and what feelings it might have aroused, and then passed on and stood before that most beautiful of all the Lady Hurdlys who had been or who might ever be. But this was too demoralizing to that mood of hardness that he had but recently assumed, and so he turned his back on the gracious image and walked away.

It was not long, however, before he found himself in Bettina's own apartments. These he remembered well, and in the main they were unchanged. Yet what a subtle difference he felt in them! Here on this great gloomy bed had that poor orphan girl slept, or else lain wakeful in the dread consciousness which must have come to her when once she realized the nature and character of the man to whom she had given herself in marriage. Here in this stately mirror had she seen herself arrayed in the splendid clothes which were the poor price for which she had sold her birthright. He stood

and looked at himself in the mirror, with an uncanny feeling that behind his own image there was that of the beautiful Bettina, whom once he had thought to protect forever by his love and strength and tenderness, and who now, with only a hired servant, was alone in the great shipful of strangers, on her way to the loneliness of that empty little village which her mother's presence had once so adequately filled for her.

He went to the wardrobe and opened the door, hoping to find some trace of Bettina. But no; all was orderly and void. Then he passed on to the dressing-table and opened the drawers, one by one. In the last there lay a small hair-pin of fine bent wire. He had an impulse to take it, but, with a muttered imprecation on his folly, he called to aid his recent resolution, and hastily left the room.

CHAPTER XVI

BETTINA had been in her old home a week —long enough to recuperate from her journey and begin to take up her life, such as it was to be. She would gladly have relaxed entirely and lain in bed to be waited on and tended by Nora, had this been possible. But she had wearied of the physical rest, which only made her mental restlessness the greater, and she had an impulse to reach out her empty hands so that somehow, somewhence they might be filled.

The neighbors had called on her promptly, but she could not see them. They reminded her too much of the mother she had lost. Mr. Spotswood had also called, but he was a reminder of the other loss, now the more poignant of the two. When she excused herself to him also he wrote her a note—the conventional thing, and that merely. It seemed strangely lacking in the solicitude and affection which she had a right to

expect from her old friend and rector. Bettina was struck with this, and instantly there flashed over her a reason for it. It was only natural that he should feel a certain resentment of her jilting of one of his cousins, even though she had done it in favor of another and more important one. She remembered that the rector had been extremely fond of Horace, and at this thought she had a sudden desire to see him. So she wrote him a note and asked him to come.

It was so long since she had talked with any one, and she was so nervous after all her morbid imagining, that she was feeling utterly unlike the old self-reliant, active-minded girl he remembered when the rector entered the room. She also, on her part, was unprepared for the feelings aroused by the sight of him ; and when he came in, his grave face and gentle manner so entirely unchanged, in contrast to all the changes she had undergone, Bettina felt a sudden tendency to tears. The thought of her mother also helped to weaken her, and the thought of Horace was a still harder strain on her endurance.

She saw a certain constraint in his manner first, as she had perceived it in his note. She felt unaccountably hurt by it, and when he took her hand a little coldly and inquired for her

health, a rush of feelings overwhelmed her and she burst into tears.

In evident surprise, the visitor tried to soothe her as best he could. Naturally supposing that this grief was in consequence of her recent widowhood, he pressed her hand, and said, gently:

"I trust you are not overtaxing yourself by seeing me, my child. If you had preferred not to do so I should not have misunderstood. Your bereavement is so recent that—"

But Bettina, trying to silence her sobs, interrupted him.

"Oh, forgive me, Mr. Spotswood," she said. "I had not thought I should break down like this. I have been perfectly calm. It is not what you suppose. Oh, I feel so wretched, so lonely, so bewildered! I would give the world if I could speak out my heart to one human being."

The rector looked surprised, but visibly softened.

"To whom may you speak if not to me, Bettina?" he said. "Surely, whatever trouble is on your heart, you may count upon my sympathy."

Bettina did not speak. With her face hid in

her pocket-handkerchief she shook her head, as if in dissent from the idea of his sympathy.

Feeling rather helpless, he changed his tactics, in an honest endeavor to get at the real cause of her trouble.

"Naturally, my child," he said, "the sight of me brings back the thought of your beloved mother. Such a sorrow—"

But again she interrupted him, this time by a silent gesture of the hand. Then she said:

"It is not that. I've got used to that ache, and although my heart would not be my heart without it, that is a silent and accepted sorrow now. Oh, Mr. Spotswood," she said, impetuously, uncovering her tear-stained face and looking at him with the helplessness of a child, "you are a clergyman; you teach that God is love and compassion and forgiveness; you have a kind heart! I know you have. Perhaps if I could tell you all I have suffered, and how deeply I have repented, you would be sorry for me, and not blame me as much as I deserve to be blamed."

She was looking at him tentatively, as if to see how far she could trust to the forbearance of which she felt she had now such need.

The rector's heart was deeply touched. This

show of humility in the high-spirited, self-willed girl that he remembered took him by surprise.

"It could never be my impulse to blame you, my dear child, and the less so when I see how bitterly you are blaming yourself for this unknown thing. If you will tell me about it, I will do all that may be in my power to help you. At all events, you may count upon my loving sympathy."

"Ah, if I only could! It would be much to me now. But you are ignorant of what you are promising. In a certain way it concerns yourself, or at least a member of your family."

She saw a slightly hardened look come into his face, but it quickly gave way to a gentler one.

"No matter what it is, if you have suffered and repented, the best sympathy of my heart is yours."

"You will regard it as a confidence—a sacred confidence?" said Bettina. "I could only tell you with that understanding. I know that a clergyman is accustomed to keeping the secrets of his people, and I could not say a word unless I were sure that this thing would rest forever between you and me."

Wishing to soothe her in every possible way,

"'TRULY, MY CHILD, IT IS A WRETCHED STORY'"

the rector gave her his promise to keep sacred what she might tell him; and thus reassured, poor Bettina opened her heart. The relief of it was so exquisite and the experience was so rare, that she told it all with the abandonment of a child at its mother's knee, and with a degree of self-accusation that might well have disarmed condemnation, as indeed it did.

Up to the time of her meeting with Horace in England, she kept back nothing, describing with absolute truth her feelings as well as her conduct. When she had reached that point, however, a sense of instinctive reserve came to her, and a few brief sentences described what had happened since.

At the end of her recital she paused, looking eagerly into the rector's face, as if she both hoped and feared what he might say.

"Truly, my child, it is a wretched story," he began, as if a little careful in the choosing of his words, "but the knowledge of it has deepened instead of lessened my sympathy for you. Your fault has been very great, but so is your sense of compunction; and as far as suffering can expiate, surely you have done much to atone. My own knowledge of the character of the late Lord Hurdly was such that I cannot pretend to be

greatly surprised at what you have told me concerning him. I regret to say it, but justice must be done to the living as well as to the dead. The present Lord Hurdly will prove, I trust and believe, an honor to the name. My intercourse with him has been comparatively limited, but no young man has ever inspired me with a stronger sense of confidence. So much do I feel this that I will confess to a strong desire that he should know upon what ground you acted toward him as you did. I have given my word to you, however, and perhaps it is as well. That poor man so lately gone to his account has stains enough upon his memory without this added one. And when I think of Horace—what he has suffered through the treachery of his kinsman—I feel that it is perhaps kindest to him also to leave this dark secret in the oblivion which buries it in our two hearts."

Bettina seemed not to hear his last words.

"He has suffered? You think he has suffered, and through me?"

"Is it possible that you can doubt it?"

"He gave no sign," began Bettina, hesitatingly.

"To you—certainly not. How could he?"

"Did he to you?" she said, breathlessly.

The rector looked at her with a sort of sad scrutiny, and was silent a moment. Then he said:

"He wrote me one letter—the most broken-hearted expression of suffering I have ever read. It was before your marriage, when he still had some slight hope that you had mistaken your own feelings, in the statement of them which you had made in your letter to him. But then came the announcement of your marriage, since which time your name has not been mentioned between us."

"Did you keep that letter?" she said.

"I did."

"Will you let me see it?"

"I am afraid I cannot properly do that."

"I beg that you will, Mr. Spotswood. You would be doing me a very great favor, and for your cousin's sake also I think I may venture to ask it. I was told that he was 'fickle and capricious, incapable of a sustained affection,' and much more in the same line. I should be truly glad to know that this was false."

"I can give you my word for that."

"But you can give me also his word, if you will," she said, beseechingly. "Oh, my dear, dear friend, I too have suffered, and I believe

that what I have endured is the worst of pain, for it comes from the knowledge of wrong to another. You cannot take away that pain, but perhaps you can restore to me a lost ideal. I had come to think that there was no such thing as love—real love—in the world; to believe not only that the man who had professed it for me was false in that profession, but that it really did not exist. Let me see that letter. It is an impersonal thing to me now, but I feel that it would strengthen me for all my future life. I am going to try to be good; indeed I am," she said, her lips trembling like a child's. "If I feel that that letter would help me, why may I not see it?"

The rector hesitated visibly; then he said:

"You shall see it, Bettina. I cannot feel that it will do any harm, and it will be an act of justice, perhaps, to him as well as to you. Whoever represented him to be lacking in depth of feeling has done him a wrong indeed. I had no need to have this proved to me, but if there be such a need in any breast, the reading of this letter must do away with it."

In a few moments he rose to take leave, having promised to send the letter to her.

"Will you send it at once?" she asked. "May Nora go with you and bring it back?"

In the stress of her feeling she forgot the impression that her eagerness might make; but it had not been lost upon the rector, who pondered all these things in his heart as he went homeward.

When he had given the letter to Nora, and she had taken it to her mistress, he wondered if he had done well. Bettina had not pretended that she had really loved the man to whom she had first engaged herself. The preoccupied interest and affection which she had given him then were not misrepresented in her confession to the rector, and she had been absolutely silent as to her subsequent and present feeling toward him. All that she said, the whole burden of her song, was that she had so wronged him in that past time; never once had she hinted at the possibility of any renewal of relations between them.

In spite of all this, the rector knew Bettina well, and he recognized the fact that she was under the dominion of some larger and deeper feeling than he had ever known her to have except her affection for her mother. And had even that, he asked himself, so permeated her whole being—mind, soul, and character—as this feeling in which he now saw her so absorbed? He answered that it had not. It was, therefore, taking a certain re-

sponsibility upon himself to show this letter. But he was acting in the interest of truth and justice, and he could not find it in his heart to regret what he had done.

Temperate, judicious, deliberate as the rector was in all his mental processes, he could not imagine that any result could come from the course which he had taken, except some very remote one. Bettina had shown plainly her determination never to divulge to Horace the contents of Mr. Cortlin's letter; he was under promise to keep the secret also, so there was no ground upon which the intercourse between them could be renewed. Besides this, Bettina was but recently become a widow. The proprieties of the situation demanded absolute seclusion for a year at least, and, in Mr. Spotswood's consciousness, propriety was supreme. He never took count of the fact that conventions could be disregarded by any right-minded person, and to this extent at least he conceived Bettina to be right-minded.

CHAPTER XVII

THE reading of that letter from Horace to the rector was a crisis in Bettina's life. Its effect upon her was singular. When she eagerly took in those pages filled with such anguish as possesses the heart but once or twice in a lifetime, the consciousness that it was she, Bettina, who had created such a love in the heart of the man that Horace Spotswood was to her now, so exhilarated her that she was capable of but one feeling—exultation. To have had this love, though now she had it not, seemed to glorify her life. To have caused him such sorrow—how greatly he had cared! In spite of all there was rapture in it!

That mood was followed by one of intense regret—an excoriating self-accusation that made her spirit writhe before her own bar of justice. Then, by degrees, when there came a moment of comparative calm, she forced herself to recognize the fact that it was the Bettina of

the past who had been so loved, and that the man who had so loved her was that youthful and impulsive Horace. Was not the present Bettina, the slightingly treated widow of his cousin, a very different being — as different as was the present Lord Hurdly from that old and outgrown other self? Surely the change in both was great—a change which she construed as absolutely to her own disadvantage as it was to his advantage.

Yet, in spite of this, that letter brought a strange strength to her heart. Since it was now so plain that he had so truly, so worshippingly loved her, she felt a summons to her soul to be her highest possible, to overcome the slothful and the evil in her, and live as it became the woman who had been so loved by such a man. Above all, she longed to make her life avail for the good of others, that she might make it a thank-offering for what she had received in the knowledge that had come to her through that letter.

For, after its perusal, she knew that never again could she entertain the doubts which had so often filled her mind at the thought of the complete silence in which Horace had accepted her rejection of him. Sometimes she had fan-

cied that it might have been a relief to him—a way out of a difficult situation; but now forever in her heart she could carry the proud consciousness that she had been as passionately loved as she had been desperately regretted.

It was a strange source, perhaps, from which to draw strength, but it availed her now. With a sudden renewal of the energy of her youth she began to look about her for work which she might do. Fortunately the rector was ready with practical, immediate employment for heart and hand, and pocket, too, alas! for now the fact was forced upon her consciousness that she was poor. It would be as one of themselves, only somewhat different in degree, that she must help these suffering ones, and, in spite of being hampered by this limitation, there was a certain sweetness in it. Her work among the poor had begun at Kingdon Hall, and there she had been often baffled by the sense of the difference between herself and those whom she wished to help. She knew that this consciousness was in their hearts as well as in hers, and that it made an impalpable but positive barrier. But now and here all was different. She longed for the money that would have enabled her to do so much more, and yet she felt it, somehow, sweet to be

as they. Her consciousness of her own past wrong-doing had so penetrated her soul with humility that she was like a totally different being.

She had said nothing to the rector of her determination not to touch the money that her late husband had left her, but she strictly adhered to this resolve. It was impossible. She simply felt she could not. She found no difficulty in forgiving him for all that he had done. She was too tender-hearted to bear malice toward the dead, but she could not touch his money. Since she had once thought about it—receiving food and clothes and comforts from his hands—she had realized that it was an impossibility. She knew that the money was deposited in bank for her, but there it might remain. She had told Horace that she would not touch it, and he should see that she would keep her word.

Then came a thought that made her smile. He had wished to force upon her the acceptance of a larger sum, because it was not proper that Lord Hurdly's widow should live otherwise than in pomp and circumstance. If he could see her now! This it was that made her smile.

She had shut up all the house except the rooms on the first floor, in which she and Nora lived alone. She kept no other servant, and

this economy it was that enabled her to give to others. She had almost no personal wants, and the income which had sufficed for her mother and herself was more than enough for her alone. A little sting of injured pride there had been at first, when her poverty became apparent to the neighbors, who naturally expected her to enlarge rather than curtail her expenses; but she soon got the better of this. The issues of her life were in a wider field than mere neighborhood comment, and, besides this, her friends and associates were now chosen chiefly from the class who were too ignorant for such comment and speculation.

For Bettina had thrown herself with a passionate fervor into the work which her hands had found to do. The one assuagement for the pain in her own heart seemed to be the alleviation of the pain in other hearts. She felt, also, a sense of thankfulness for the knowledge which had come to her through the rector, which made the whole work and service of her life seem all too little for her to give in return for this boon. As for Horace, her feeling for him was akin to worship. It was he who represented to her henceforth the ideal which, like a fixed star, should give light to her path, though so immeasurably far above her.

What a strange life was this into which she had now entered! She felt the certainty that her courage would be sufficient for it, but with all her resolution she could not always keep back the bitter tears of her wordless, hopeless, uncontrollable longing. At times this was a thing so mighty that she had the feeling that, if her body were only as strong as her spirit, she would be able to swim through those thousands of watery miles that separated them, only to tell him the truth, and then lay down her life at his feet.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was one of Bettina's weary days. Its hours had lagged and dragged until the evening had come, and she had sunk down, exhausted and depressed, in a big old-fashioned chair in front of her wood fire, which seemed the only ray of cheerfulness within or without. She had had these feelings before, and she knew that they would probably pass, but never before had it been so borne in upon her that life was sad and wretched alike for those whom she was trying to help and for her who was so in need of help herself—little as they dreamed it. Were they worth helping, those poor evil-environed creatures who so continually disappointed her hopes and efforts? Was she worth helping, either—weak, aimless creature that she was—who had vowed to be content in the mere consciousness that Horace lived, and that he had once supremely loved her, and then again and again had fallen into this hopeless discontent

which thirsted so for what she had pledged herself to give up—the possession of that love to satisfy the present hour's need?

She lay back in the big deep chair, her white hands loosely grasping its arms, and her white lids lowered. Now and then a tear would trickle from beneath those lids and a slight contraction of pain would move her lips. Any one looking in upon her so might well have wondered where were the friends and companions of this beautiful, lonely woman, shut into this small room, in the silence of a twilight that hung damp and gray outside, and that the smouldering fire lighted but fitfully within, while the low murmur of flames fitfully broke the silence.

Not a sound escaped her lips. She gazed longingly, sadly into the glowing heart of the fire, and saw visions and dreamed dreams, but not pleasing ones; they only served to make her sadness deeper.

Presently the door opened, and Nora came in with the lamp. Glancing at her mistress, who did not move, the woman then went out and brought a small tea-service on a tray.

"Don't light the kettle yet, Nora," said a low voice from the depths of the chair. The speaker did not move; her manner was that of a person

who deprecated the least noise or intrusion, and Nora took the hint and silently put down the tray. Then, in the same dull tone, her mistress said:

"I know you want to go to church. Go. I can make tea for myself when I want it."

Nora, in comprehending silence, left the room.

Still the relaxed figure in the chair moved not. The fire whiffed and crackled now and then, but beyond this there was no sound. The lamplight showed more plainly the fair youth and loveliness of that black-clad form, which never, in its most brilliant days, had looked so exquisite as now, when there was none to gaze upon its beauty or to share its solitude. The hands were ringless, for Bettina had taken off her wedding-ring after the reading of the letter which the lawyer had brought her, and with it she had renounced the last vestige of allegiance to her late husband's memory. There was no bitterness in her heart toward him. Simply he existed not, as though he had never been.

Vaguely she heard the sound of Nora's departure, as the door was closed behind her, and still she sat there wordless, motionless, almost breathless as it appeared, for her bosom scarcely seemed to move.

Presently there came two tears from under the closed lids; then quickly others followed them. The sense that she was freed even from the danger of Nora's observation weakened her more and more. Then with the helpless, whispering tones of an unhappy child, she said:

"My God, how desolate I am! How can I bear it? How long must it endure?"

Still she did not move except to raise her lids and cast upward her tear-drenched eyes, while she caught her lower lip between her teeth.

Suddenly there was a step upon the piazza—a man's step, as if in haste. She started and sat upright. Who could it be? No man except the rector ever visited her, and this was not the rector's step. She hastily brushed away the traces of her tears and sat listening.

Then came a tap at the door—not loud, but firm, distinct, decided. It sounded strange to her, unlike the tap of any messenger or servant who had ever come to her house.

She got up, leaving the door of the sitting-room open that the light might enter the dark hall.

Then, most unaccountably, a sense of fear, very unusual to her, seemed to possess her. She stood still a moment in the hall and waited.

The knock was repeated, so near this time that it made her start. She was not naturally a timid woman, but she felt a sense of physical fear which was totally unreasoning. What harm was likely to come to her from such a source? She compelled herself to go forward and open the door.

It was very dark outside, and she vaguely distinguished the outline of a tall man standing before her. The light from the open door at her back threw out her figure in distinct relief, and it was evident that she had been recognized, for a voice said, in low but distinct tones,

"Lady Hurdly."

She gave a cry and pressed both hands against her breast, sharply drawing in her breath. Then she took a few steps backward, throwing out one hand to support herself against the wall.

"Forgive me," said the well-known voice—the voice out of all the world to which her blood-beats answered. "I have come on you too suddenly. I ought to have written and asked permission to call. I should have done so, only I feared you might deny me."

Somehow the door was closed behind them and they had made their way into the lighted

room. Bettina, still pale and breathless, began to murmur some excuses.

"I beg your pardon; I was frightened. Nora had gone out, and I was all alone. I did not know who it might be. I never have visitors, and I was afraid to open the door."

He was looking at her keenly.

"You should not be alone like this," he said, both resentment and indignation in his tone. "Why do you never have visitors? Why did Nora leave you? Where are the other servants?"

"There are no others. There is only Nora," she said, recovering herself a little. "I let her go to church to-night. I am not usually afraid. Why should I be? Perhaps I am not very well." As she uttered these incoherent sentences she sank into a chair and he took one near her.

The expression of his face had changed from anxiety to a stern sadness.

"And you live alone like this," he said, "without proper service or protection? And, in spite of all that I could say and do, you will not take the miserable pittance which is your own, and which is wasted there in the bank, where it can avail for no one? Do you think this is right to yourself—or kind to me?"

The quiet reproach of his tone disturbed her.

"I do not mean to be unkind," she said, her voice not quite steady, "and indeed I have all that I need. Nora has more than time to attend to me, and as for company, it is because I do not want it that I do not have it."

"And you think you can live without companionship?" he said. "You will find you are mistaken; but of that I have no right to speak. There is one subject, however, on which I do claim this right, and it is the fulfilment of this purpose which has brought me to America."

"You came all this way to see me?" she said, lifting her brows as if in gentle deprecation. "You were always kind." Her voice broke and she said no more.

"It is not a question of kindness," he said. "It is a matter of the simplest right and duty. Will you hear me? Are you able to hear me to-night, or shall I come again to-morrow?"

"Speak now," she said. "I am perfectly well, and am ready to hear whatever you may have to say."

Her voice gave proof of a recovered self-control. The necessity of making this a final interview between them was borne in upon her, and sitting very still and erect, with her hands

clasped tightly together, she waited to hear what he might say.

"Your leaving England so suddenly," he began, "was, as I need not say, a disappointment to me. I had hoped to change your mind and purpose concerning the acceptance not only of money which is your own by legal right, but of such as is also yours by every rational law of possession. It was to me an insupportable idea that you should go away without the means of living as becomes your rank and station."

Bettina, with a rather chill smile, shook her head.

"Rank and station I have none," she said. "I have money enough to live as becomes my mother's child; that I am, and no more. It is the only bond to the past which I acknowledge. The name and title which I bore a little while were never mine in a real and true sense. I do not care to speak of it; it is all past; but the very fact that your cousin saw fit to leave me with what you call a mere pittance shows that he felt the distance, the lack of union, between us, as I felt and feel it."

It was a relief to her to say this much. He could gather nothing from it, and she wanted him to know that she had freed her soul from

every vestige of its bondage to the man whom she chose to designate as his cousin rather than by any relationship to herself—even a past one. This point did not escape him.

"It is with humiliation that I receive your reminder that that man was, in flesh and blood at least, akin to me," was the answer; "and for that reason I have felt it to be my duty to make whatever poor reparation may be in my power for the evil that he has done."

He spoke with extreme seriousness, and there was a tone in his last words which conveyed to Bettina the suspicion that they referred to something more than any act of Lord Hurdly's which had heretofore been mentioned between them.

She waited, therefore, in some agitation to hear what his next words should be.

"I shall have to ask your forgiveness," he said, "for touching upon a matter which might well seem to be an impertinence on my part. The necessity is forced upon me, however, and I shall be as brief as possible, if you will be good enough to listen."

Bettina answered merely by a bend of the head.

"As long as I can remember," he began, "I have had a certain instinctive distrust of the

late Lord Hurdly. It grew with my growth; but I never thought it proper, under the then existing circumstances, to give expression to it. As time went on, observation confirmed instinct, and it became evident to me that he was a man of powerful will, and was more or less unscrupulous in the attainment of its ends. After his death, in going into the affairs of the estate, and various other matters which came under my observation, I found that the truths laid bare before me revealed him as a far worse man even than I had imagined. It was a revolting manifestation in every sense; but even when those matters had been closed up—when I supposed that I was done with the man and aware of the worst—a revelation was made to me which, though of a piece with the rest, and no worse in its essence and kind, came home to me with a thousandfold intensity, from the fact that it nearly concerned both myself and you."

Bettina's heart beat wildly. She dared not look at him, and with an instinct to protect herself from betrayal at every cost, she said, in a voice which was so cool and calm that the sound of it surprised her as it fell upon her ear:

"Go on. Explain yourself."

She had taken up a paper from the table and

was using it as if to screen her face from the fire, but she managed to get somewhat in the shadow of it, so that her companion had only a partial view of her features and expression. In this position, with her eyes bent upon the fire, her countenance was wholly inscrutable to him. There was a moment's silence before he continued.

"How far the explanation is necessary," he said, "I do not know. I am aware that you received a sealed letter, through Cortlin, from a man named Fitzwilliam Clarke, who is now dead. What that letter contained is your own affair. I also received a letter from the same source and by the same hand. It is of the revelation contained in that letter that I am come to speak to you."

Bettina hardly knew whether she was waking or sleeping. The astounding suddenness of the consciousness which had come to her now seemed to stun both her body and her mind. She made no sign, however, as she sat absolutely still, and her companion went on.

"The letter to you was delivered, you remember, before my return to England. The interval which elapsed before the delivery of the letter to me—which occurred scarcely more than a

week ago—was due to the fact that Cortlin had been instructed to put each of these letters into the hands of none but the man and woman to whom they were addressed. In the second instance he was prevented by illness from the prompt performance of his duty. He has had a long and serious attack of fever. As soon as his condition of health permitted he sent for me and put the letter into my hands, telling me that he was ignorant as to its contents, but that a letter from the same source had been delivered to you by him immediately after the death of the scoundrel whose treachery had betrayed you into a marriage with him."

Bettina could not speak or look at him. The thoughts which were seething through her brain were too confused for speech. One thing, however, was quite clear to her. The resentment that this man so fiercely manifested was for her sake, not his own. His anger was an impersonal thing. He had a manly and chivalrous nature, and the mere fact that her mother had once committed her into his keeping would constitute a strong claim on such a nature. He was outraged that a countryman and kinsman of his own could so villanously have duped her. As for his own wrongs in the matter, he ap-

parently did not consider these. For all consciousness of them in his words and tones they might never have existed.

While these thoughts were passing through her mind, he had risen, and was pacing the floor with restless strides. Now he paused in front of her and said:

"I trust it may not seem to you that I did wrong to come to you and tell you of the revelation that had been made to me. I have done it in the belief that the letter which you received conveyed the same information. May I be allowed to know if this is true?"

Bettina bent her head, but said no more.

"Then I feel myself justified in having come," he said, in a tone of relief. "If I could have known you ignorant of the infamous wrong that was done you, by the unscrupulous means used to beguile you into a marriage which must so have tortured and humiliated any woman, I might have kept silent. It might perhaps have been best to omit from the list of the wrongs you must have suffered this crowning infamy of all. But since it seemed certain that you knew it, and since it had doubtless been the reason of your refusing to touch the money which was so rightfully your due, and of your leaving the country

where this great wrong had been done you, I could not rest until I had spoken. I could not still the longing to give you a certain solace which I hoped it might be in my power to give. I knew how sad and lonely you were. I had written to the rector and asked for tidings of you."

"You had? He never told me," she said, wonderingly.

"I particularly bound him not to do so; but I did write more than once, and got his answers. In that way it came to me that you were unhappy — courageously and unselfishly, yet profoundly so, and it was not difficult for me to comprehend the reason. You will forgive me for going into a dead and buried issue for this once; but I knew your nature, and it was obvious to me that you were torturing yourself because you felt that you had done a wrong to me."

Bettina caught her breath suddenly, and covered her face with her hands.

"Is it not so?" he said.

But she could not speak. The shrinking anguish of her whole attitude was her only answer.

Then he took the seat nearest her, and said:

"It is with the hope of lifting this totally un-

necessary burden from your mind that I have come. I beg you to have patience with me while I speak to you quite simply and tell you why you would be doing wrong to blame yourself on my account. For this once I must ask you to let me speak of the past—not the recent past—let us consider that in its grave forever—but the remote past, in which for a short while I had a share. I, too, have my confession to make and pardon to beg, for I am conscious that I wronged you, though it was through ignorance, youth, inexperience, and also—forgive me for mentioning it, but it is my best justification—also because I loved you, with a love which I was then too ignorant even to comprehend. I needs must beg you to remember that, in owning my great wrong to you. This wrong," he continued, after an instant's pause, "consisted in my urging you to marry me when you did not love me. I feared it was so, even then; but I was selfish; I thought of myself and not of you. When the whispered misgiving would rise up in my mind I forced it down by vowing that if you did not already love me I could and would make you do so. When the blow fell, and I knew that I had lost you, I knew that my selfishness in thinking chiefly of my own happiness had been properly rewarded.

At least this was the feeling that possessed my heart after the first. You were young, confiding, inexperienced. I knew better than you possibly could know that you did not love me. Later, you knew it also."

He waited, as if for her response. From behind her close-pressed hands the answer came.

"Yes," she said, lowly, "I have long known that it was a mistake on my part. You are right. I did not love you."

Had she been looking, she would have seen a shadow cross his face—a very faint one, as the hope that it obscured had been faint also.

"Therefore," he said, "I took advantage of you, and obtained from you a promise which I should never have asked. I want you to feel that I realize the wrong I did you in that, and ask your forgiveness for it."

Slowly she lowered her hands and looked at him.

"And you can ask forgiveness of me?" she said.

"I humbly beg it—as on my knees."

"Then what should be my attitude to you?"

"The proud and upright one of never having done me any conscious wrong."

"But when I left you, rejected you, threw you off—"

"That was not done to me, but to the man you supposed me to be—the man who had been proved to you a scoundrel, by such proof as any one would have deemed you mad to doubt."

She looked at him somewhat timidly.

"You are generous indeed," she said.

"I am no whit more than just. You were absolutely warranted in such a course toward me. What I long to do—what I have crossed the world in the hope of doing—is to get you to forgive yourself, to free yourself of a hallucination which is casting a needless shadow on your life."

"Oh, you are good—good!" she said. "I never knew so kind a heart. Therefore must my unending misery be the greater that I have once wounded it."

"That consciousness should have no sting for you hereafter. You did it in utter ignorance. I cannot claim that I was half so ignorant in my wrong toward you. But surely we may remember that we have once been friends, and so we may feel that there is full and free forgiveness between us before we part."

She did not speak. That last word had pierced too deeply to her heart.

"You do forgive me—do you not?" he said, as if he misunderstood her silence.

"I thank you—I bless you—I seek *your* forgiveness," she said.

At these last words he smiled—a smile that had a certain bitterness in it. Then suddenly his face became rigidly grave.

"If I had not given you my forgiveness, long ago," he said, "I should like to offer it to you now, at a price. I wish to God that I could."

"What do you mean?" she said, a sweet perplexity upon her face. "What price have I to pay for anything?"

"Ah, there it is! It may seem brutal of me to put a literal construction upon what you have used as a figure of speech, but let the truth come out. You are poor, unprotected, alone, and you ask me to go and leave you so! God knows it is little enough that I have it in my power to do, but the possession of money would enable you at least to live as it becomes you to live. I do not speak of your title—it is not what you are called, but what you are, that I have in mind. If you had money, even the small income which I so desire that you shall accept, your life would be different."

But Bettina looked away from him, and shook her head in the gentle negation which he knew to be so final.

"How would my life be different?" she said.

"You could make it so."

"In what way?"

"You could travel, for one thing."

"I do not want to travel. I desired it once, and I got my wish. But with it came a wretchedness that all the travelling in the world could not carry me away from."

"Then what is to be your life?"

"What you see it now. I do not wish to change it for any other. I have tried the world and its rewards. There is nothing in them."

Her tone of absolute, unexpectant decision maddened him.

"My God, Bettina!" he exclaimed, too excited to notice that the name had escaped him. "Are you in earnest? Can you mean it? I wish I could believe that you did not. But there is a deadly reality about you now which makes me fear that you will keep your word. That you should spend your life in this isolation, that you —you—"

He broke off, as if words failed him.

"What better can I do?" she said. "You must not think of me as idle and useless. I am going to try not to be that. I have tried a little. Ask the rector. And I am going to try more.

There is but one thing that I deeply desire, and that is to be a better woman than I have been in the past. Oh, I will try hard—I will, indeed I will—to do a little good in the future, to make up for all the harm I have done!"

She ceased, her voice failing her, and as she looked at the man standing near her she saw that he was scarcely listening. Some intense preoccupation made him take in but vaguely what she was saying. She saw that he was deeply moved in some way, and the consciousness that this was so gave her a sense of alarm. She felt her own will weakening, and she knew that somehow she must get this parting over, if her strength were to suffice for it.

"Good-bye," she said, holding out her hand. "Don't be too sorry for me. You have lightened my heart inexpressibly by what you have told me. Now that I can feel that you know all—that, wrong and wicked as I was, I was not so false as it seemed—I can bear the future with courage. I am sure of it. I want to say good-bye now, because I prefer not to see you again. You would only try to shake me in a determination that is not to be shaken. Don't trouble about me—please don't," she added. "I have health and youth, and these will suffice me for what I have to do."

"Health and youth!" he cried, ignoring her proffered hand, and throwing his own hands up in a gesture of repudiation. "And what do these signify in a situation such as yours? They only mean that you will prolong an existence which, for such a woman as you, seems worse than death. You ask me to leave you so? To say good-bye—"

"Yes, I beg it, I implore it, I insist upon it," she interrupted him, feeling that her strength was almost gone. "You have said that you were willing to do me a service—then leave me."

She sank back in her chair exhausted.

"My God! am I a brute?" he said. "Have I made you ill with my idiotic persistency? I will go. I will rid you of the distress and annoyance of my presence. But before I go, Bettina," he said, with a sudden break in his voice, "I must and will satisfy my heart by one thing: I must, for the sake of my own soul's peace, tell you this. I have never ceased to love you, and I never shall. I gave you up when I saw the renunciation to be inevitable, but I knew then, as I know now, that I can never put any other in your place. You were the love of my youth, and you will be the love of my old age, if my lonely life goes on till then. Don't turn from me. Don't hide your

face like that. I ask nothing but this sacred right to speak. I know you never loved me. I know it is not in me—if, indeed, it be in any mortal man—to enter into the heaven of being loved by you. But, at least, you have been the vision in my life—the sacred manifestation of what girl and sweetheart and woman and wife might be—and for that I thank you. In the shadow of that beatific vision I shall walk henceforth, and believe me when I say that I shall walk there alone."

Bettina, with her face buried in her hands, remained profoundly still. When he had waited a moment he began to fear that he had overtaxed her strength too far, and that she might have fainted.

Kneeling in front of her, he took her two wrists gently in his hands and tried to draw them away from her eyes. The strong resistance that she made to this gave evidence enough that she was conscious in every sentient nerve.

"Forgive me," he said; "I am going—I have been wrong to force all this upon you—but it is the last time that we shall meet. Let me, I pray you, see your face once more before I turn away from it forever."

The tense hands relaxed within his grasp, but

he caught no more than a second's glimpse of the beautiful face before it was hid against his shoulder.

At the same instant a low voice whispered in his ear:

"Don't move until I speak to you."

Overwhelmed with wonder, he felt the hands which he had grasped now holding fast his own, that she might compel him to the stillness which she had commanded. Then the soft voice at his ear went on:

"You were right in saying that I did not love you—that you would have urged me into a marriage to which I could not have brought the true feeling. I did not know it then, but I know it now. And I know it now because—because—" her voice trembled and her breath came quick—"because now I do love you. Oh, Horace, better love than this man could not have or woman give."

She ended in a burst of tears, and her exhausted body leaned against him for support.

For a moment he felt an amazement so overwhelming that he seemed half unconscious from the whirling in his brain. Then, as a lightning flash lights up the whole dark heaven in an instant's time, the truth was revealed to him, and,

with that consciousness, his arms were tight about her and his kisses on her lips.

If he questioned her at all, it was with his spirit, and her answer came in that ineffable sense of union which fused their souls in one. For long still moments they rested so, in that embrace, and when they moved apart and looked into each other's eyes it was to take up forever that united life which was to bind them in true marriage.

When Nora returned from church she found them sitting quietly before the fire, the lamp burning brightly under the kettle, from which the Lady Hurdly that was and was to be had just made tea for her lord.

THE END

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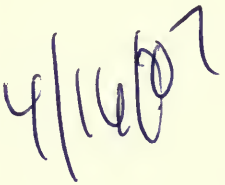

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